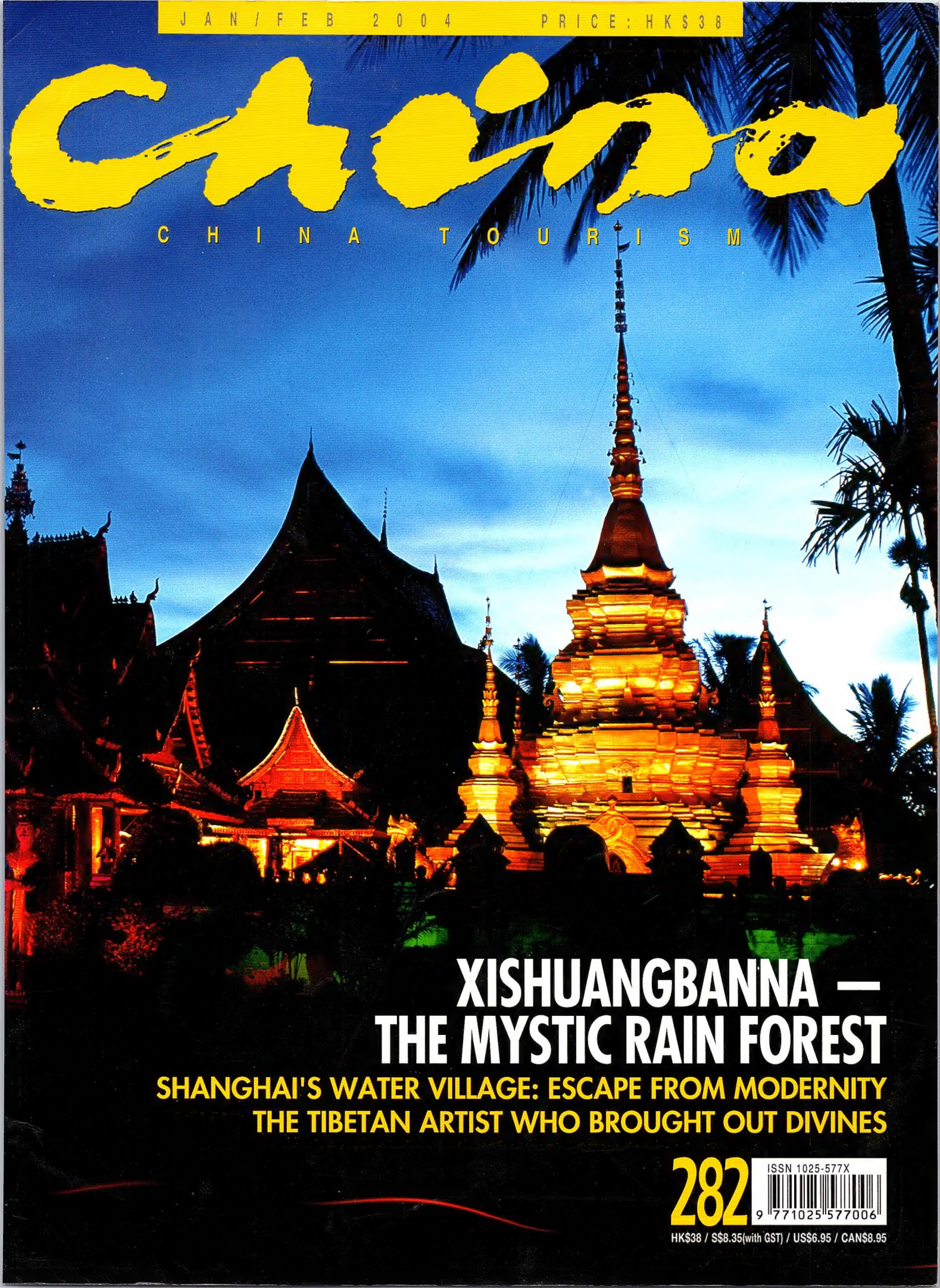


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China

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XISHUANGBANNA — THE MYSTIC RAIN FOREST

SHANGHAI'S WATER VILLAGE: ESCAPE FROM MODERNITY
THE TIBETAN ARTIST WHO BROUGHT OUT DIVINES

282

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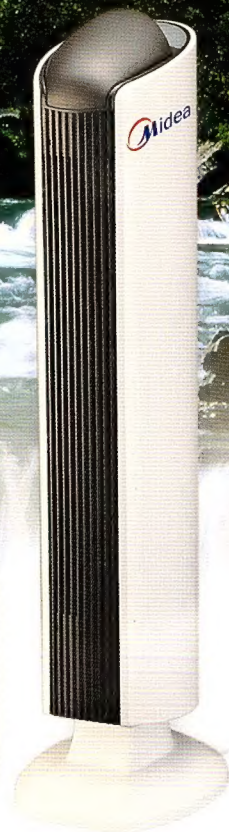
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FOCUS ON XINJIANG

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, all providing tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem embedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak, the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique and colourful culture.



FOCUS ON SHAANXI

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.



FOCUS ON YUNNAN

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate all year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-la, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



The Call of China's West

FOCUS ON TIBET The Tibet Autonomous Region of China is a land of mystery for tourists, a land of wonders for explorers, a land of purity for Buddhists, and the ultimate challenge for mountaineers. Its beautiful landscapes, unique geographical features and rich cultural legacy continue to attract an increasing number of visitors.

The countless attractions of Tibet make it impossible to include them all in one book. This photographic publication offers an introduction to some of the Region's most celebrated features: the Potala Palace and its precious collection of cultural relics; the Jokhang Temple with strings of worshippers prostrating themselves before it; the Shoton Festival and the Sunning of Buddha ceremony; the ruins of the mystical Guge Kingdom; and the amazing Qiangtang Grassland...

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FOCUS ON GUANGXI

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the diverse traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.



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CHINA TOURISM

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Xishuangbanna — The Mystic Rain Forest

Photos & Article by Chan Yat Nin, Li Zhixiong, Xu Yunhua

Despite dire prediction of rain forest extinction on the Tropic of Cancer, Xishuangbanna beats the odds of survival. This exotic green land is a secluded world that is alive with friendly ethnic groups, tropical plants and wild elephants.



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Mysteries of the Grassland Buddha

Photos & Article by Dianna Law

An unexpected disease, a reader's prayer, an ancient legend... the beginning of my mysterious journey.

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Niujie — Snack Capital

Photos by Wang Xiaofei Article by Yang Yajie

There's an old saying, "Beijing has the best local snacks in China, the best Beijing snacks come from Muslim cuisine, and the best Muslim snacks are on Niujie (Beef Street)".

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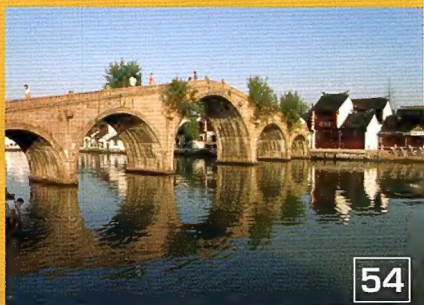
Shanghai's Tranquil Water Village: Zhujiajiao

Photos & Article by Joseph Ma

Although Zhujiajiao remains relatively unknown and slightly off the beaten track, this works well in its flavour. Compare with other water villages that have turned themselves into popular tourist attractions, it has kept its integrity.



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Photos & Article by Wang Juncai

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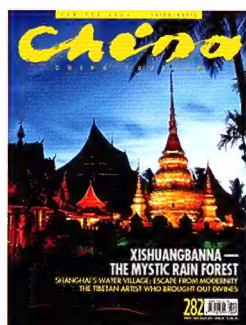
Photos & Article by Li Xueliang

Known as the "Arid Center of Asia", the remote Altun Mountain Nature Reserve remained unknown until a group of daring adventurers lifted its mysterious veil.

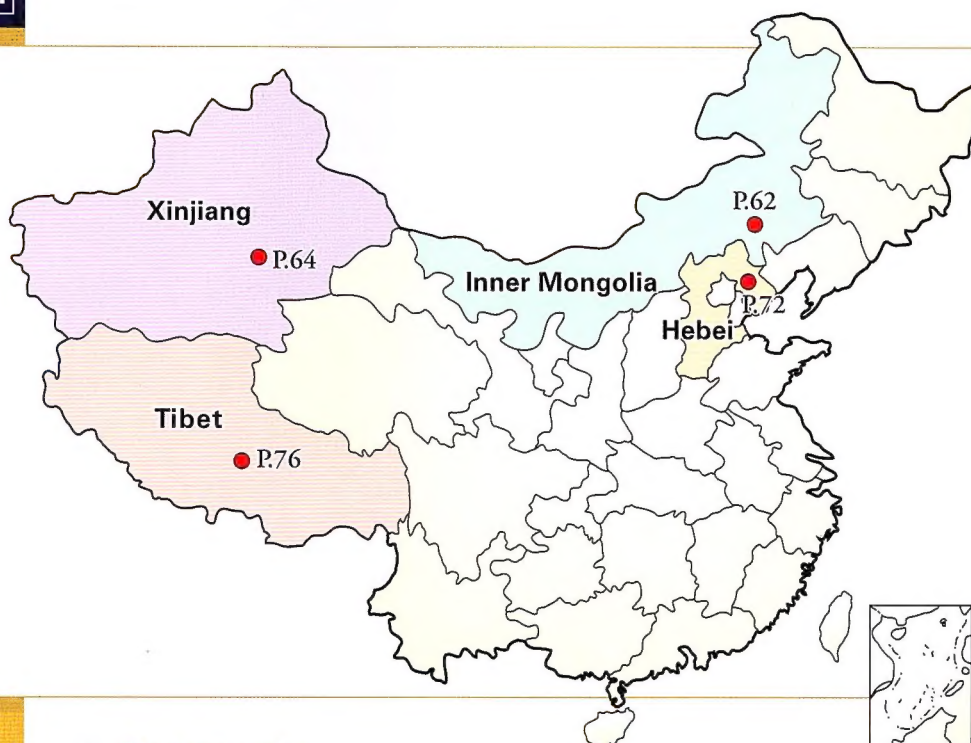
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The Tibetan Artist Who Brought out Divines — Amdo Qamba

Photos & Article by Wen Pulin

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Editorial Dept., Business Dept., Advertising Dept., Sales Dept. Tel: (852) 2561 8001

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Hong Kong China Tourism Ltd. (Licence No. 351850) Tel: (852) 2516 9228

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FROM THE EDITOR

See Nature in Action!

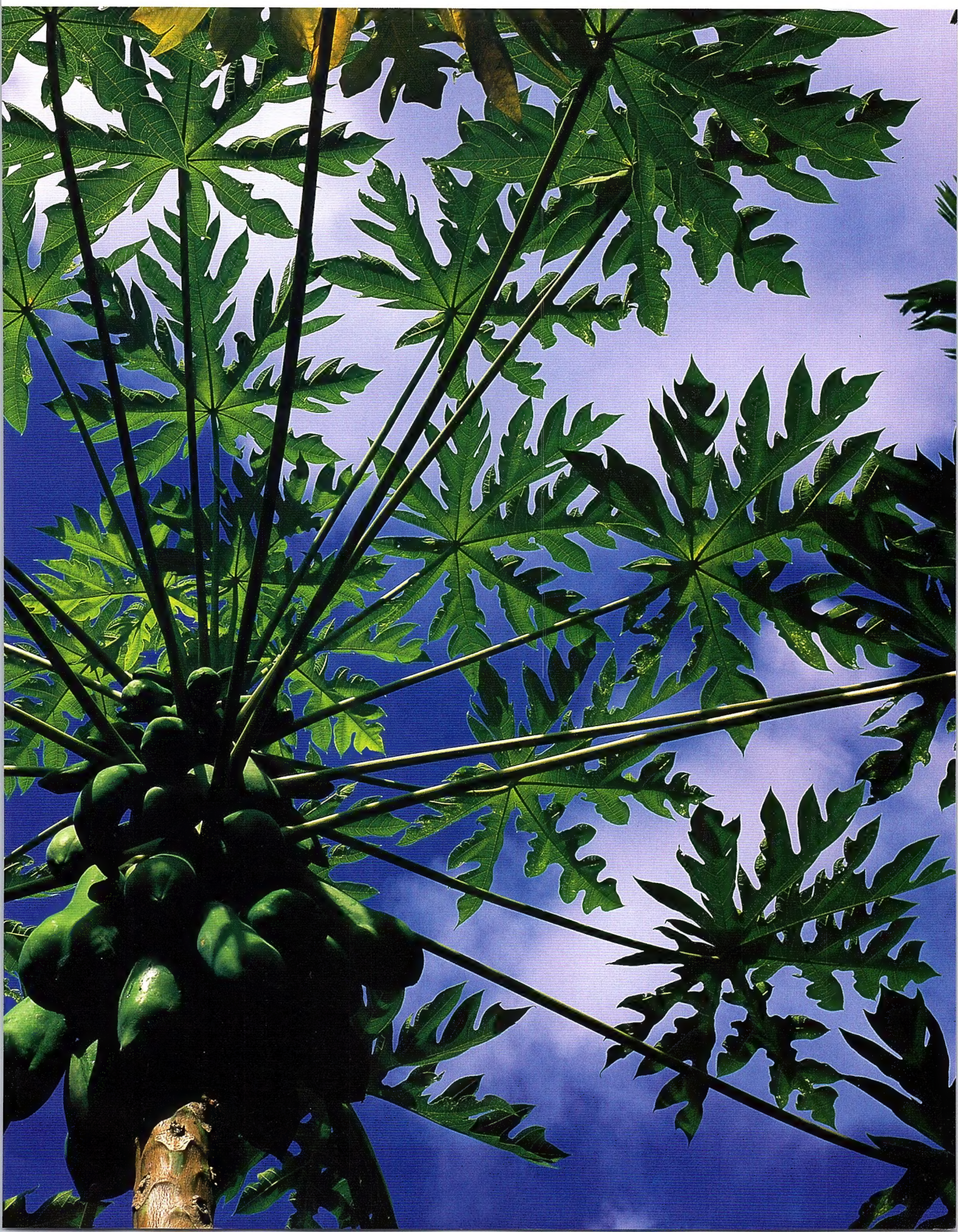
Just when you think you've seen all the faces of China — from dynamic metropolises to the mysterious realm of Tibet, and from larger-than-life architectural wonders such as Great Wall and Forbidden City to the epic pastures of Inner Mongolia — this land of astonishing landscapes offers yet another completely different visage: a tropical rain forest.

Xishuangbanna (Yunnan Province) is home to over ten ethnic groups who coexist with the myriad species of plants and wildlife living in the unspoiled, verdant paradise. Its richness in history, heritage and culture tempts people from around the world to explore the hidden secrets of the untouched.

The misty green land is full of possibilities for visitors: exploring the forest trails in the lush jungle, strolling the academic botanical garden or natural reserve, unwinding in the natural lodges of tree house, wandering in the Wild Elephant Valley, paddling on the river, befriending with the local villagers and joining their festivals, tasting the gamy Dai cuisine....

Since planning a trip to a vast wild forest can be mighty confusing, we will chop this jungle into manageable chunks for you. One bit of advice though. It is easy to get overwhelmed in the forest just by gazing up at the towering trees, but try to take a closer look at the small things too; and don't miss the many interesting micro-ecosystems around you.

Tropical Rain Forest of Xishuangbanna (by Guo Jianshe)



A Harsh Winter for Mongolia

Heavy snowstorm, along with strong wind, hit Inner Mongolian grazing areas at the end of November last year. This natural disaster threatened the grazing areas and livelihoods of more than 50,000 herdsmen on the Hulun Buir Plain, north China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Some areas, including 6.4 million ha of grazing grounds, were covered in up to 30 m of snow. The Hulun Buir Plain has 8.4 million ha of pasture lands, but most only began to grow grass from late July due to severe drought and insect attacks in the early months of 2003. As a result, grass growth on the plain fell by 50%. The snowstorm led to a shortage of 110,000 t of fodder for 3 million heads of livestock. The local government organized efforts to fight the disaster and maintain normal life on the pasture lands.



Chimpanzees Get "Better" Abode at Zoo

Three chimpanzees, two males and a female, at Shanghai Zoo got to move into a newly decorated home as their New Year present. It was part of a project, co-sponsored by the zoo and the "Roots & Shoots Education Program", a conservation body, to offer more wild space to chimps at the zoo. The organization raised 480,000 yuan (US \$57,831) for the project, while the zoo is responsible for the remaining 480,000 needed to establish a "chimp world." Dr. Jane Goodall, a famed British zoologist who founded Roots, helped opening the new home. The 42 m² house features a steel emulational "tree" enveloped by brown cement, decorated as barks. Above the tree is a big net containing food and fruits. Zoo chief said that they would build three more such homes for the zoo's 20-plus chimps. In addition, the designer of the chimp house will further simulate a wild environment with forests and outdoor climbing poles by May.



Restoring the Beijing's Style

The Beijing Administration of Land Resources and Housing announced that all the flat roofs of residential buildings along the streets within the city's Third Ring Road will be changed into sloping ones. According to the administration, besides practical reasons like renovation for heat insulation, this project is aimed at giving back a traditional view of the ancient capital, as old Beijing dwellings feature caesious sloping tile roofs.

Beijing's sense of history has a lot to do with the architectural legacies of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911) ranging from the well-preserved Forbidden City and remaining siheyuan (quadrangle courtyard, the typical

traditional civilian structures). Huge commercial value associated with historical heritage buildings has driven the municipal bureaucracy to reconsider its excessive push of new architectural landmarks as symbols of modernity over the last few years. Numerous examples of traditional residential architecture have disappeared as a result of the government's eagerness for a modern look in the early 1980s. Many flat-roof buildings in the old city area were set up at that time. On top of that, the municipal government adopted the housing renovation policy that allowed developers to replace old and sometimes derelict homes with new high-rises in the 1990s.

Such a massive overhaul impaired Beijing's attempt to apply for World Heritage Site listing in 2000 and 2001, and the frustration forced the government to list 40 protected historical zones, which account for 42% of the old city. The municipal government has also increased its efforts to restore some key relics and older streets in the city. Regulations have been set on the height, style and color of buildings in the inner city to maintain Beijing's overall ancient appearance. And now, even the roofs of residential buildings have been considered.

Beijing to Build Ancient, yet Modern Sculptures

As Beijing prepares for the 2008 Olympic Games, an intense construction drive is underway in China's capital to improve its image. And the latest part of this effort is a new plan to build sculptures around the city that reflect its blend of ancient civilization and modernity. Compare the sculptures in Beijing with other capital cities around the world, and you'll find them rather disappointing. But that's all about to change under the city's new plan. The style of the new sculptures will be oriental, expressing the flavor and charm of Beijing. The key region set out in the plan include areas north of Tian'anmen Square, and the Second, Third and Fourth Ring Roads. The themes will be strictly selected from designs by renowned sculptors from around the globe. The sculptures are expected to be made from a variety of materials, including the rare metal titanium.

Beijing already has more than 1,000 sculptures in its streets, squares and parks. Some of the most noted are in the War Memorial Garden, Huangchenggen Park and Xidan Culture Square.

Villages in Gansu Lit up by the "Sun"

Until the end of 1999, more than seven million families of villagers and herdsman in over 20,000 out-of-the-way villages in West China had been living a life without electricity. In 2000, the Chinese Government started "Light Project", planning to supply power for the 20 million people in about 10 years by new energy technology such as photovoltaic and wind power generation.

Photovoltaic power generation is a technology to change solar energy into electric power through conversion appliances. As most of western China is of high altitude and gets sufficient sunlight, photovoltaic power generation by using solar energy is effective in these remote villages.

More than 9,000 families from nine townships in the remote area of Gansu Province have benefited from the Light Project since it was put into effect two years ago, and villagers are now enjoying the modern lifestyle of watching TV and listening to radio. By the end of 2002, more than 400 photovoltaic power stations, 80 photovoltaic power generation systems for village schools and over 150,000 home photovoltaic electric power systems had been setup, mostly in western regions such as the Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Gansu and Qinghai provinces. The project will continue to benefit many other regions in China.



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Mingyueba Ruins: A Small Town of the Tang Dynasty

Chongqing The Mingyueba market town ruins were situated less than a hundred kilometers away from Yunyang County (Chongqing Municipality), and they were covered by wild reeds and shrubbery. However, an archaeological team from the History Department of Sichuan University has dug out pits and ditches of different sizes, which look like trenches on a battlefield.

At the end of 2002, only one pit was made, measuring five meters in both length and width. Digging one meter deeper, a building base appeared and further work brought to light a house site, which was three rooms wide and two rooms deep. Further excavation led to two house sites at the east-west trend, where there were wing-houses on both sides of the former north-south house. While cleaning up the wing house ruins, archaeologists again found a new larger house base, and it turned out to be a group of quadrangle courtyard from the Tang Dynasty (618—907).

By digging deep and drilling, the scale, layout, structure and nature of the ruin became more and more clear. Covering a total area of 150,000 m², it included dense buildings, necessary road network and tombs, having been a market town with complete functions. The discovery was of special significance to the field of archaeology.

"City of Silk" Builds Sericulture Museum

Sichuan Dubbed a "city of silk", Nanchong City (southwest of Sichuan Province) is building a museum to show the 5,000-year history of sericulture in China. Construction on the museum began in 2000 and is expected to be completed and opened to visitors very soon, according to the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Agricultural Sciences, which invested 30 million yuan (3.6 million US dollars) to build the museum.

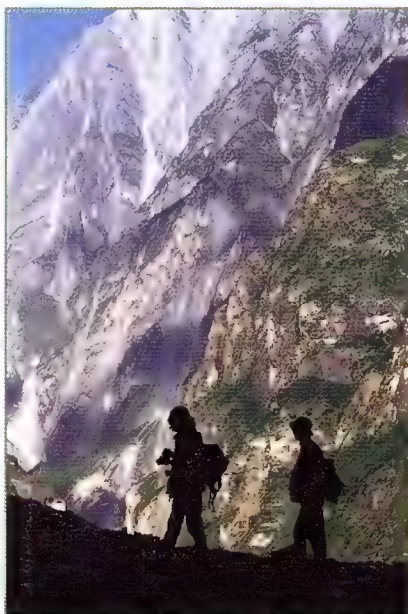


Located in Yingxi Township of Nanchong, the museum consists of an indoor and outdoor exhibition areas and covers over 13 ha.

Indoor exhibits include machines and tools that Chinese have used to grow mulberries and raise silkworms, as well as relics featuring the development of mulberry-growing, silkworm-raising, silk-reeling and silk production over the past thousands of years.

In the outdoor area stand some granite steles, stone carvings and engraved stones, which tell the story of the ancient Silk Road, through which Chinese transported silk products from central China to Middle Asian areas more than 2,000 years ago.

Currently, Nanchong is the only Chinese city which has set up a complete industrial administration system that covers mulberry-growing, silkworm-raising, silk production, silk fabric processing and education and research on sericulture and silk production.



Ecotourism to Save Nature

Yunnan Shangri-La is an imaginary paradise on earth, but the villages hidden among the rolling mountains of Shangri-La County, Southwest China's Yunnan Province, are losing its heavenly appeal.

In its struggle to shake off poverty, the locals have endured substantial logging, mass tourism and other destructive exploitation for the past 20 years. Fortunately, things started to change when a community-based conservation project was implemented at the end of 2002.

The Yunnan provincial government, the Global Environment Facilities (GIF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), jointly initiated the project. This eco-cultural tourism project was designed to manage by the villagers. A set of Tibetan-style guesthouses was built, and they became the common property of the village. Income from tourism would belong to the villagers, and the villagers themselves would decide how to divide the money.

Since the project helped the villagers to rise above the poverty line, the people no longer rely on logging for survival. What's more, people's concepts have changed, and little has been heard of the mass tourism projects.

New China-Japan Air Route Opens

Feature Travellers between Haikou, capital of island Hainan Province in south China, and Fukuoka of Japan will have more options as a new air route linking the two cities is to open the end of the month. Since the end of November last year, China Southern Airlines will fly between the two cities via Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province. The domestic planes depart from Haikou at 7:30 am and arrive at Guangzhou in an hour. Then they depart Guangzhou at about ten and arrive in Fukuoka in three hours.



Hukou Waterfall's Donkey Ride

Shortcut Tourists who visit the Hukou Waterfall on the Yellow River, located in Linfen in north China's Shanxi Province, are likely to be intrigued by the eight elderly men who offer donkey rides. Like most of the locals, they wrap their heads with white towels, wear coarse clothes and carry long-stemmed pipes around their necks. In addition to offering tourists donkey rides, they sometimes sing folk songs or tell comic stories.

Zhang is the one the "donkey men" who started the business about eight years ago. With the booming of tourism at China's second largest waterfall, Hukou, this area has been attracting more and more travellers over the past few years. Zhang, who has lived in the village his entire life, once took his donkey to the waterfall to try his luck. He charged each tourist 2 yuan (US 24 cents) for a donkey ride and some photographs taken with the donkey, and his plan worked. The tourists from the city were thrilled to see a donkey. Eventually, Zhang persuaded seven of his village friends to join him in his new business venture. Thanks to their brisk business, their life has been greatly improved. Most of them have built new houses and — this might surprise you — have bought motorcycles.



Sex Museum Flees Shanghai Streets

Shanghai China's Ancient Sex Museum, once located in the Shanghai's booming streets, now has to move to Tongli Town in East China's Jiangsu Province due to a funding shortage.

It is the third time for this private museum to move in the past four years. After moving out of the busiest part of Shanghai in 2001, it is now located in the isolated residential area of 1133 Wuding Road. The new museum in Tongli, 80 km away from Shanghai, will open on April 18.

"The museum is about 20,000 to 30,000 yuan (US \$2,420 to 3,630) in the red every month, it is very difficult for me to fill this hole," said Liu Dalin, head of the museum and professor of sexual science.

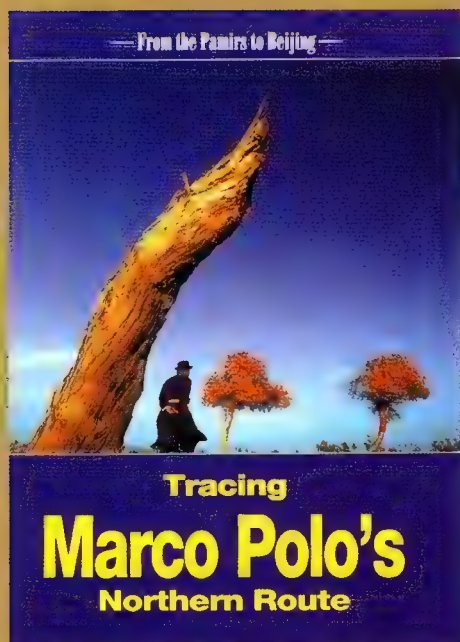
Liu agreed to let the museum stay in Tongli for the next ten years, and he started to move at the end of last year. The new museum, next door to the famous scenic spot of Tuisi Garden, will cover over 7,000 m², which is more than 10 times bigger than now existing site. But town officials reiterated the focus is not on making a profit. "I won't expect many people would come to the museum at first. Our first aim is to protect, research and exhibit Chinese culture."

Among the over 3,700 exhibits collected by Liu, over 20 pieces are 5,000 to 6,000 years old. Tongli will adopt a new slogan for the museum: "Build the best sex culture museum in the world."

Town officials are worried if local people will not be as open-minded as Shanghai people, and thus inviting Liu to give some speeches about sexual science in the town in advance. In addition, the museum will only be open to foreign visitors at the beginning, and then will gradually open to local visitors.

Photographic & Practical Guides for Your China Tours

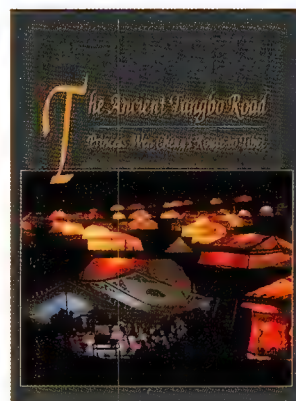
Before you set off for your perfect journey, you may have to prepare your itinerary carefully. Each of the following recommended readings offers different types of information which cater to our readers' various interests: exploring photography, or tourist information. They will be great guides to your China tours.



Tracing Marco Polo's Northern Route

A record of an 80-day journey in which our authors drive their jeep 12,000 km long through the northern regions of China following in the footsteps of Marco Polo's historic journey from the Pamir Highland to Beijing. In a medley of images and words, we present you with the fascinating scenery and various ways of life in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet.

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The Ancient Tangbo Road

Covering four provinces including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the ancient Tangbo Road was created on the map when Princess Wen Cheng was sent as a bride to Luoxie (present-day Lhasa) during the Tang Dynasty. Our photographers and writers, who have followed this arduous route, present you the graceful sights and unique ethnic customs on the way.

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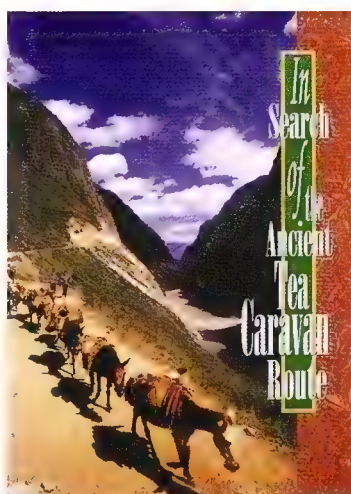
In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route

The ancient Tea Caravan Route can be traced back to 2,000 years ago, starting from Xishuangbanna at China's southwestern end, passing through boundless forests and valleys to the Sino-Indian, Nepalese and Sikkimese borders on Tibet, the "Roof of the World".

This book is not-to-be-missed by every daring adventurer.



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Guide to Xinjiang

This book is especially designated for DIY travellers who desire to explore the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are detailed introduction to scenic spots in five main areas in Xinjiang including Ürümqi, Turpan, Southern and Northern Xinjiang, and Central Tianshan. Practical tourist information on accommodation, ticketing, shopping, local specialty, as well as travel tips are covered.

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Sacred Buddhist Lands

Buddhism in China is inevitably linked with some of the country's best known mountains. And going deep in the mountains and far away from civilization is an ideal place for retreat. Belonging to the four Bodhisattvas respectively, the four most famous Buddhist mountains — Wutai, Jiuhua, Putuo and Emei — are nestled with numerous monasteries and nunneries which have been worshipped by pilgrims for thousands of years. Tourists to these places will totally be soaked in "Kingdoms of Buddhism".

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The Five Sacred Mountains The Yellow Mountain

Located in five provinces in China, every of the Five Sacred Mountains — Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, Hengshan and Huashan — has its magnificent natural and cultural landscapes. Besides, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), is also famous for its spectacular rocks, pine trees, and sea of clouds. It will be a great enjoyment in reading both the detailed text and remarkable images by our experienced photographers as recorded in this book.

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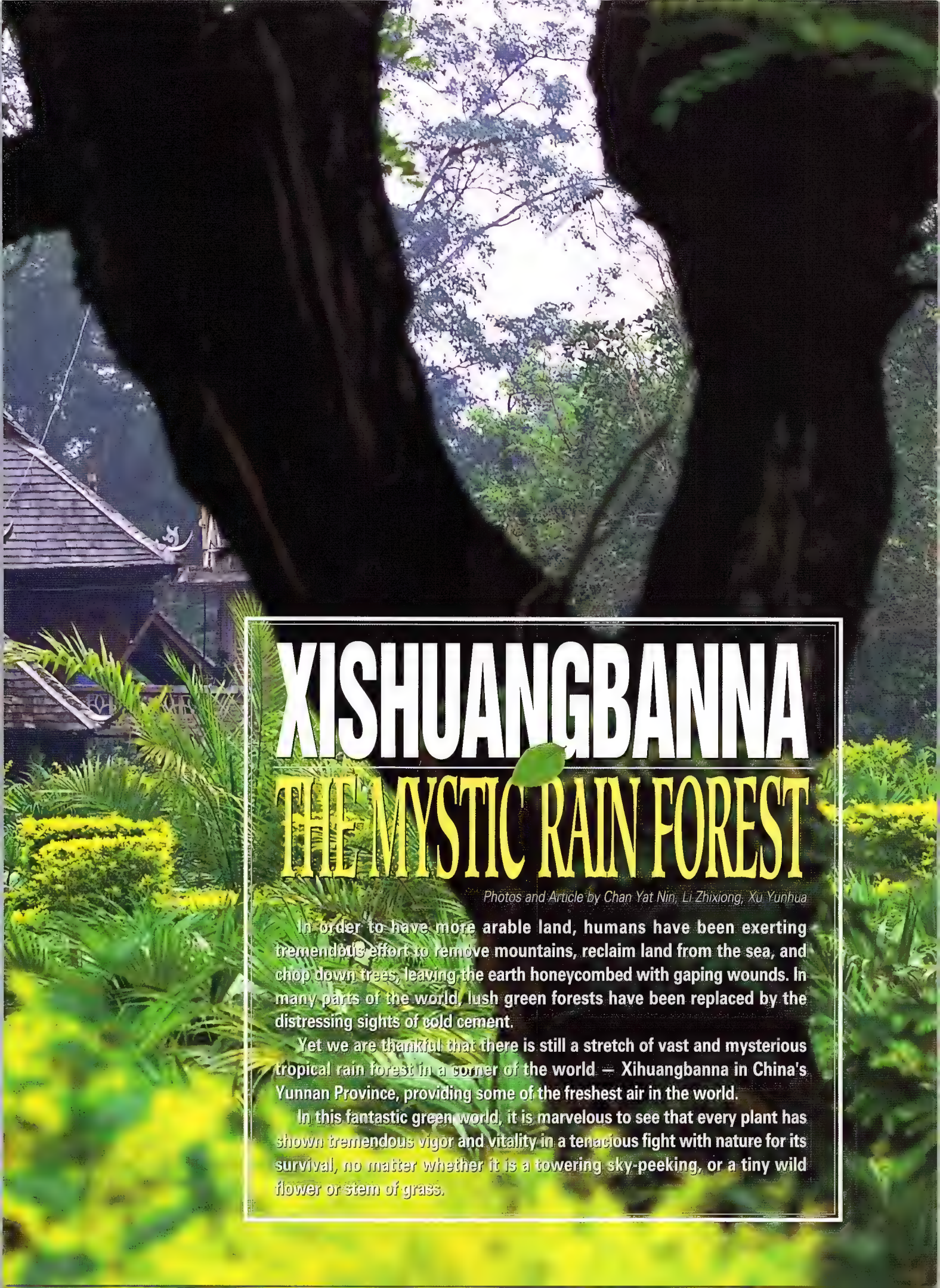
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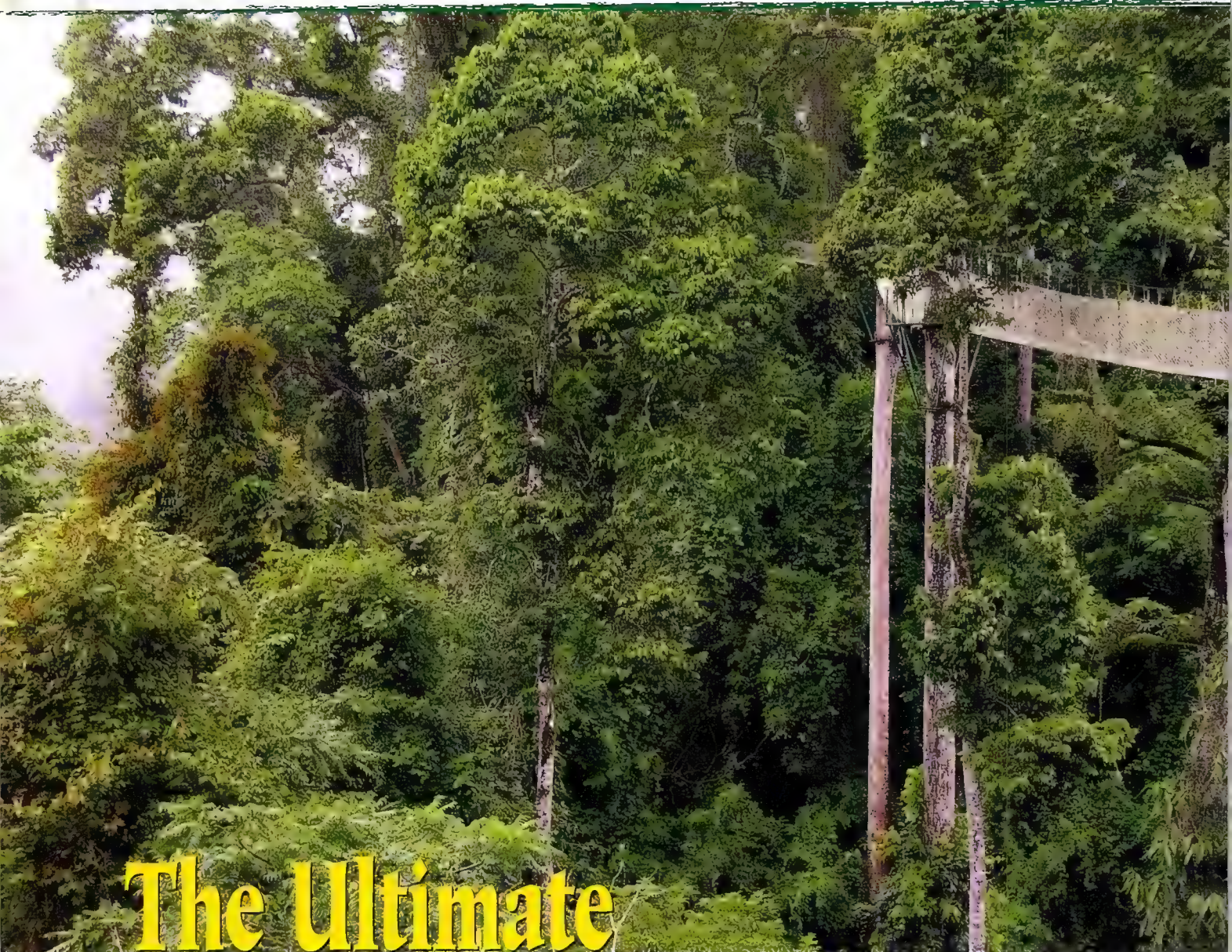
THE MYSTIC RAIN FOREST

Photos and Article by Chan Yat Nin, Li Zhixiong, Xu Yunhua

In order to have more arable land, humans have been exerting tremendous effort to remove mountains, reclaim land from the sea, and chop down trees, leaving the earth honeycombed with gaping wounds. In many parts of the world, lush green forests have been replaced by the distressing sights of cold cement.

Yet we are thankful that there is still a stretch of vast and mysterious tropical rain forest in a corner of the world — Xihuangbanna in China's Yunnan Province, providing some of the freshest air in the world.

In this fantastic green world, it is marvelous to see that every plant has shown tremendous vigor and vitality in a tenacious fight with nature for its survival, no matter whether it is a towering sky-peeking, or a tiny wild flower or stem of grass.



The Ultimate Xishuangbanna Discovery

There is still a large area of tropical rain forest on the Tropic of Cancer, right in Xishuangbanna of China!"

When the news was confirmed by the world botanical circles, the surprise it aroused was no less than a major archaeological discovery; because deserts predominate on the Tropic of Cancer, especially in Central Asia, West Asia, and North Africa, due to chronic drought. The Tropic of Cancer is therefore nicknamed "the tropic of desert". Many scientists had predicted that there would be virtually no tropical rain forest left at this latitude.

In spite of such dire prediction, an enchanting tropical rain forest was discovered in Xishuangbanna. This exotic green land offers wild animals, special plants, unique culture and customs, and adventures of the lifetime.



A Rare Oasis on the Tropic of Cancer

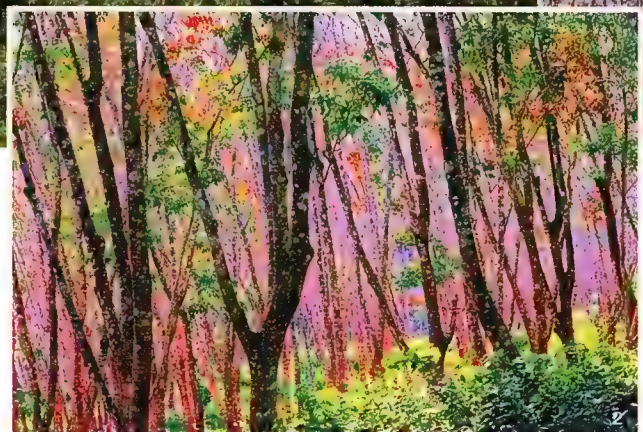
Located on the northern fringe of the tropic highland between 21°09' to 22°36' parallel of north latitude, the average height of the river valley basin in Xishuangbanna is over 500 m above sea level. It is a transition area between tropical biotic to sub-tropical biotic division. Because of its high altitude and disadvantageous location in the north latitude, Xishuangbanna does not seem to possess the ideal geographical conditions for the formation of a tropical rain forest at first glance. However, these deficiencies are compensated by other favourable geographical features. The first reason being that Xishuangbanna is backed up in the north by the Himalayas and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, which block the cold northern air. The second reason is that Xishuangbanna is slanted to the south topographically,



so the southeastern monsoon can blow right into the area, thus forming a tropical monsoon climate with high temperature and plenty of rain in the valley and lowland.

Nonetheless, these conditions alone cannot guarantee the growth and preservation of a tropical rain forest since the glacial period in geological history might well have interrupted its evolution. Fortunately, Xishuangbanna is situated in an area where the ancient southern and northern continents merged, thus escaping a catastrophe in the biological history of earth — the glacial attack during the Fourth Glacial Epoch. Its special background of geography and historical geology enabled the birth of tropical rain forest with rich fauna and flora resources, making it an oasis on the Tropic of Cancer.

Tropical rain forest, to be exact, refers to the evergreen tall vegetation growing in the humid torrid zone. It has a unique appearance and formation that features most prominently a rich variety of species. Although tropical rain forests cover only seven percent of the land on earth, plant species found there make up more than half of



the total number in the world. Because of the high temperature and humidity, plants grow luxuriantly in a great variety of colors and shapes.

Front Page: Bamboo houses of the Dai people in the heart of the dense wood. (By Chan Yat Nin)

1. The "air corridor", about 50 m above the ground, stretches among the tops of the tall *Parashorea cathayensis* (sky-peeking) in the virgin forest of Menglila. Ecologists study the plants in the upper forest, while the rest of the forest is opened to visitors. (By Xu Yunhua)

2. Xishuangbanna is rich with rubber trees. (By Yin Xin)

The Ultimate Xishuangbanna Discovery



The Gateway to the Tropical Rain Forest

In the scorching sun of August, we set off from Jinghong and drove all the way through a green forest. In about an hour, we reached Menglilun Town of Menglila County in southeastern Yunnan Province. Crossing a 100 m chain bridge, we arrived at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden. People coming to Xishuangbanna for adventures usually bypass this gateway to the tropical rain forest.

This "gateway" was actually opened more than 40 years ago by China's botanical guru, Cai Xitao. He came to Menglilun on horse, and went on to the Hulu (gourd) Island surrounded by Luosuo River — a branch of the Lancang River. Step by step, he and his colleagues built up the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden on Hulu Island. Now the botanical garden serves not only as a base for scientific research of tropical plants, but also as a miniature of the tropical rain forest itself — a "Paradise for Plants" that encompasses scientific research, species preservation, education and tourism.

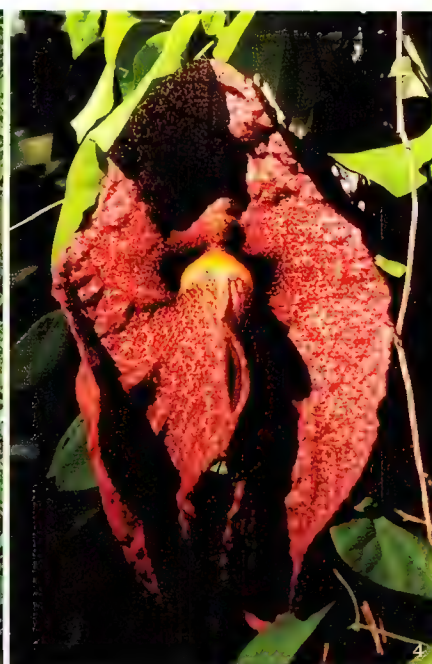
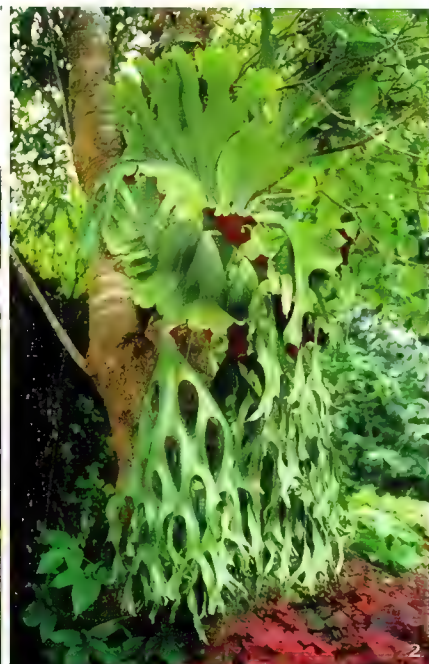
This botanical garden is huge, covering an area of some 900 ha. Over 30 special plant zones were set up here where more than 9,000

species of tropical and sub-tropical plants from all parts of the world can be found. Led by a Dai (the predominate ethnic group here) lady tour guide, we walked into this paradise. Most of the guides are locals from nearby Dai villages who become tour guides after some professional training.

The garden is divided into sections by dense tall woods or water, with every section a pleasant surprise for visitors. The palm tree section is the center of the whole botanical garden, with a collection of some 150 palms from all around the world, such as the sun-blocking pattras (tall and straight areca trees), spiny date palms that fan out like peacock tails and *Raphia vinifera* (long clusters of spiked fruit). The pattras are particularly important, for they have widely used as the cultural messengers. The pattra scriptures we saw in a temple were written by monks on pattras, which gave rise to the 1000-year-old "Pattra Culture" in the areas inhabited by the Dai ethnic group.

Grass That Dances

One of the most fascinating plants in the garden is the "Dancing Grass". This specie appeared rather homely to me; as our guide told us



to stand back and began to sing to the grass, we saw a miracle: the leaves of the little grass started to wave lightly, as if dancing to the song!

Next to the palm garden is the water plant section. Just a glance at its clear and green lake surface would be enough to delight everyone. A row of tall *Roystonea regia* is reflected in the water, and the tree's peculiar shape — tapering at both ends but plump in the middle — looks like a big vase. The most conspicuous on the water are the giant water lilies. Their large leaves, stretching no less than a meter in diameter, float flat on the water, and could support a weight of 60 to 70 kg. The one that we saw was strong enough to hold a child.

Strangulation and Aerial-Root Forest

It is interesting that a group of daring wild life seekers like us, who had our minds set on exploring the virgin forest, was so totally captivated by these beautiful plants.



In the tree garden, there are a lot of peculiar specimens that represent various kinds of abnormal botanical phenomena found only in the primitive forest, obviously with the help of artificial cultivation. The most staggering of these phenomena is strangulation. The strangler is a big green tree that hoops another tree tightly with its strong net-like roots. The poor host tree is strangled dead and withered away, with a hollow in its rotten trunk.

The big green tree, *Ficus altissima*, is a type of banyan tree. Its seeds are taken and spread by birds and can grow on the branches of other trees in a shady and humid environment. It has aerial roots that are not attached to the stalk or leaves, but are exposed either entirely or partially to draw water and nutrition from the air. As the roots grow along trees down to the ground, the roots adhering to trunks will grow more new branches that hold tightly to the host trees, scrambling for space and sunlight till the host trees are strangled to death and their remains sucked out completely. After the process of strangulation is completed, the strangler will let its aerial roots go down into the ground, forming pillar-like roots to support its ever-expanding thick trunk. At the same time, its domain is increasing continuously, and eventually, a large number of pillar-roots will grow into a stretch of "forest" where it is hard to distinguish between the roots and trunks. Hence, a tropical aerial-root forest slowly developed.

1. A land of kings — king palm trees line the bank and king lotus float on the water. (By Li Zhixiong)
2. Lujiaoqie (*Platyserium wallichii*) grows on the trees. (By Li Zhixiong)
3. A dead banyan tree. (By Li Zhixiong)
4. Birthwort. (By Li Zhixiong)
5. One tree is enough to make a forest in Daluo, Menglihai. (By Li Zhixiong)

The Ultimate Xishuangbanna Discovery

The "Air Corridor" in Bubeng Nature Reserve

While the botanical garden offers visitors a chance to see the richest variety of plant species in China, the Bubeng Nature Reserve of Menglila County let people have an intimate taste of the jungle.

Lying 15 km north of the county seat, the Bubeng Nature Reserve is unique in the whole Xishuangbanna Nature Reserve. When entering the forest, it was so dark that we could hardly distinguish the colors of the plants close by. The straight towering giant trees were like arrows shooting right up to the sky, and the crowns of the trees, like arrowheads, looked incredibly small.

These are called *Parashorea cathayensis* or sky-peeking. In the Bubeng Nature Reserve, they normally grow as tall as 50 to 60 m high, or even 70 to 80 m. They are the giants in the forests, regarded as the "upper class" of the tropical rain forest.

To make it easier for visitors to observe this stretch of forest, the World Wildlife Fund (U.S.) helped build a 500 m-long "air corridor". This aluminum corridor is suspended in the air by steel wire.

As we stepped onto the air corridor and walked among the giant tree crowns, our excitement was beyond description. Between the first and second layers of tree crowns, we could see clearly the magnificent sight of how the species survive in the jungle.

The top story of tropical rain forest is represented by the sky-peeking at a height of 40 to 70 m. The 20 to 30 m trees belong to the second story and the 10 to 20 m trees, the third story. Because the bare trunks of the giant trees have let in much of the sunlight, the second and third stories are especially lush and can hardly be separated from each other. The fourth story is 5 to 9 m, sparsely scattered with branches and leaves. The woody climbers are trying to go upward, clinging to tall trees to get some share of the sunshine. Below them, the bushes and plants at bottom that can barely get any sunshine tapped every little bit of light-gathering abilities to survive tenaciously between the trees.

Among the great variety of plant species in the tropical rain forest at Menglila, there are many rare species such as the sky-



peeking, *Knemaglobularia warb*, *Pellacalyx yunnanensis*, and ancient species like *Homalium cochinchinensi* and *Podocarpus imbricatus*, dating back to the Quaternary ice age more than a million years ago.

Dazzling "Garden in the Air"

We continued our trip in the forest after visiting the Bubeng Nature Reserve. By way of Menglilun, we turned west onto a highway to Ganlanba. Before long we arrived at the Rain Forest Valley — a newly developed scenic area in the tropical rain forest. Its entrance is decorated like a garden, but once into the valley, the scenery is that of



a primitive rain forest. Only a small number of plant nameplates and road signs reminded us of a tourist site. Walking up along the valley, we saw an air corridor crossing the valley that enables people to appreciate this green world from above. Having experienced the air corridor at Bubeng, we were not as excited as before. However, this relatively lower air corridor made it easier for us to see more details. Huge woody climbers display their extraordinary molding abilities here by bending into a myriad of grotesque shapes, rising and falling

on the giant trees. Some giant herbaceous plants as tall as trees reminded us of the Jurassic period. Looking upward at the towering trees, we saw many flowers and grass on the tree crowns displaying their gorgeous colors and shapes, as if in a beauty contest, thus forming a "garden in the air".

Luckily we brought with us a telescope, so that we could appreciate fully the dazzling "garden in the air". Hanging up there are orchids, Chinese wisterias that are wreathing around tree trunks, and even many small bushes known as dwarf trees — a real feast for the eyes. In the tropical rain forest where there are many strata

"Barbarians" in the Virgin Forest Garden

Returning to the highway from the Rain Forest Valley, we drove west to the Xishuangbanna Virgin Forest Garden 8 km to Jinghong City, and stayed in the three-star hotel in the garden. The Virgin Forest Garden caters mostly to tourists, for it has, in addition to the real virgin rain forest valleys, many

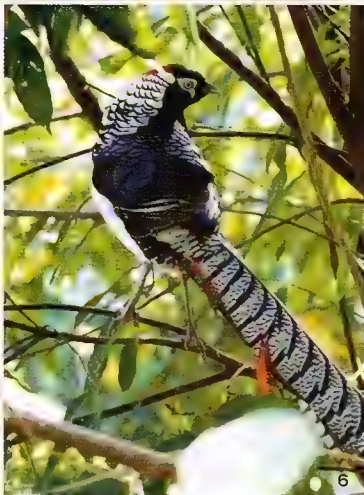
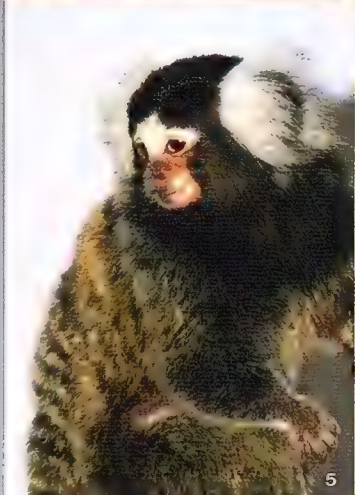
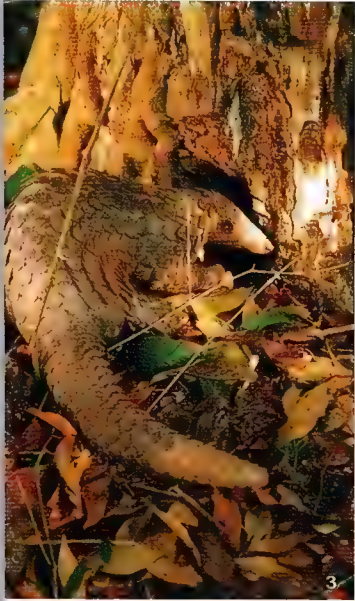


cultural scenic sites related to forest, as well as ethnic group custom shows and performances. In the rain forest we saw the giant "King of Strangulation," the 1,360-year-old ancient vine, the banana tree growing in the "garden in the air," and also an antiar tree soaring into the sky.

Antiar is also called upas, and both names make one shudder even at their mention. This is the most poisonous tree in the world, as no one — man or animal alike — can survive if hit by an arrow soaked in its poisonous fluid, which the local indigenous people used as a powerful weapon.

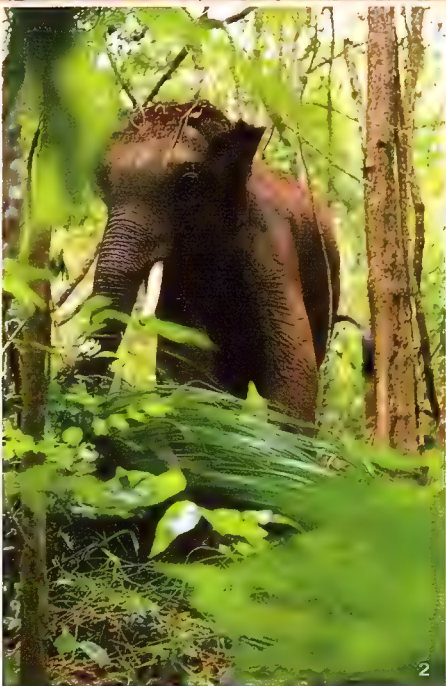
The indigenous people are a tribal group who used to lead a nomadic life deep in the mountain forest. No one knows the tribe's name, and even the local minority ethnic groups cannot communicate with them. They were invited to come down from the mountains and live in the virgin forest. They still keep to their way of life, but they need to get used to being visited by tourists though.

Next came the Wild Elephant Valley and the Banna Monkey Mountain. Xishuangbanna boasts 38 species of wildlife under state protection, such as the wild elephant, the urus, the green peacock, the white necked gibbon, the sloth monkey and the hornbill.



of existence, the small plants are not content to remain at the bottom. In order to obtain the precious sunlight, they have to extend their living space upward and find new abodes in the small gathering of dirt accumulated in the cracks of the bark and branches of tall trees. The humid air provides them with the water they need, so the aerophyte's seeds can go up to join the "upper class" with the help of birds and become much better off by settling down in the cozy little new homes.

1. The giant liana in various shapes (By Liu Yunchuan)
2. The poisonous sap of the upas tree was used originally on arrowheads for hunting animals. (By Chan Yat Nin)
3. A pangolin in the forest (By Liu Yunchuan)
4. A rare white monkey (From Banna Monkey Mountain)
5. The marmoset, *Callithrix jacchus* (From Banna Monkey Mountain)
6. A rare white-belly golden pheasant (By Qiu Kaipei)
7. The indigenous people of the virgin forest used to live in the trees. (By Chan Yat Nin)



A Relentless Quest for Elephants

Photos by Li Zhixiong, Qiu Kaipei, Xu Yunhua, Liu Dejun Article by Li Zhixiong

The wild Xishuangbanna elephants inhabited in the dense forest of Mengliyang will often attack strangers when provoked. I have been chased by these overlords of the forest before, but despite the narrow escape, I was just as eager to continue my pursuit of the wild elephants again.

My first trip to Xishuangbanna was 10 years ago. A friend told me that on the highway near Sanchahe at Mengliyang, tourists' cars were often confronted by wild elephants who would walk in team from the head of the motorcade to the end. The news made my heart leap wildly and I wanted to be there at once. After discussing my plans with some friends, we decided to venture.



My First Pursuit

Ten years ago, Xishuangbanna was not accessible by airplanes. So we drove there from Kunming, a journey of two whole days. I remember that when we reached the boundary it was already pitch-dark. Expecting to meet with some wild elephants along the way, we drove along at walking pace, in some places not even turning on the headlights. Yet there was no trace of elephant. By the time we got back to the guesthouse after the disappointing trip, it was already 2 a.m.

In order to take pictures of the wild elephant, we were prepared to camp under strenuous conditions. The first thing we did after arriving at Mengliyang was to invite an elephant expert from the Mengliyang Elephant Protection Institute to teach us some basic survival skill. We learned how to distinguish the elephants' fresh stools and footprints, and how to escape if they were to chase after us. After we gathered enough food and water for three to four days in the wilderness, we set off confidently into the dense tropical rain forest at Sanchahe.

Sanchahe is located at the juncture of the eastern and western sections of the Mengliyang State-level Nature Reserve — a passage sure to be used by wild elephants as they walk between the two sections. The

place is crossed by many valleys and rivers, and there is a great variety of plants that wild elephants like to eat. This is the area among the 6.6 ac of the Mengliyang Nature Reserve where wild elephants gather together and which they frequent most.

On entering Sanchahe, we saw an ecosystem of tropical rain forest and sub-tropical evergreen broadleaf forest. The virgin forest sheltered the sun, so although it was sunny outside, the forest was somewhat dark and gloomy. Along a path stretching in the tropical rain forest, we could see from time to time one or two piles of elephant dung and tree branches broken by elephants.

We reached the central area frequented by wild elephants at sunset. The valley was divided by a small river, on one side of which was a suspended hut supported by a thick log structure — the Elephant



Protection Institute observatory. On the other side of the river, there were two small log cabins built on the two huge trees about 15 m apart. The log cabins are used for accommodation, but they were empty.



Await Wild Elephants

We had a simple supper in the observatory, and then we spread some salt by the river to attract the elephants to eat.

After the darkness of night settled over the land, we hid ourselves in the two "tree hotel" rooms and waited quietly. Whenever there were sounds in the forest, we sent out signals and probed the river valley with our torches. As luck would have it, after a long vigilant night we had seen nothing.

The next night, we tried to stay as quiet as possible. A thick fog fell and vapor poured into our log cabins. It was very chilly. A good part of the night passed without any trace of elephant, so we packed into the cabin and fell asleep. Suddenly, a huge noise came from below like a trumpeting blast from a monastery horn, echoing in the empty river valley. In a great flurry I couldn't even unzip my sleeping bag, so I had to squeeze myself out of it. I tried to light up the ground below us with the torch, but because of the thick fog, the light just couldn't penetrate. Below the trees, wild elephants were wreaking havoc but we could only hear the noise without being able to see anything. As if to tease us, the elephants didn't leave until it was close to daybreak.

After two nights of bad sleep, we dragged our heavy feet on the third day along the river to the west and hiked in the tropical rain forest. Suddenly, someone walking ahead rushed back with a pale face and shouted, "They're coming, they're coming!" Then he disappeared in the dense forest. I was dumbfounded at first, wondering what had happened. Then suddenly I remembered that people in the Elephant Protection Institute said that if chased by elephants, we should run down the mountain as fast as possible. So I dropped the tripod and camera bag, and made a dash into the forest.

1. Tree houses offer the perfect vantage point for watching the elephants. (By Liu Dejun)
2. Elephants eating in the dense forest. (By Chan Yat Nin)
3. In Mengliyang Natural Reserve, wild elephants are often seen walking on the road. (By Qiu Kaipei)
4. Xishuangbanna people raise elephants in the wild elephant valley. (By Chen Jundong)

A Relentless Quest for Elephants

A Narrow Escape

It turned out that we had followed the elephant group encountered the previous night without knowing it. The guard elephant found us and came to chase us away. Fortunately the person walking ahead of us warned us in time. Perhaps the elephants just wanted to scare us away, otherwise we might not have survived the attack.

In my first encounter with wild elephants in the forest, I lost a pair of glasses and suffered many bruises on my hands and feet, yet I still wasn't able to see clearly what they looked like before it was all over.

My last visit to Xishuangbanna was during my long vacation in August this year. I read in a magazine that in recent years wild elephants went there almost every two or three days. March, April, September and October are the peak periods of wild elephants' activities, sometimes even five elephant groups would visit the place on the same day. Since August is so close to September, maybe I would have a chance to see some wild elephants again, so I travelled once more to Xishuangbanna.

Experience as an "Elephant Herdsman"

During a flight of just 45 minutes, I was carried from the temperate zone to the tropic zone.

My first stop was of course the Wild Elephant Valley.

This time I took the cable tram over the Valley — my first experience looking down over the endless tropical rain forest that is inhabited by about 350 wild elephants.

The log cabins we stayed at 10 years ago are still there, only now they are accompanied by more "tree hotels". The original observatory becomes a forest bar, and there are air corridors between tree houses where people can walk freely. The cabin I used to stay is turned into a "tree hotel", and it lives up to the standard of modern hotel except for a TV set.

It was a pity that during a whole night of sleep I didn't hear anything, and after walking around by the river, I still found no trace of elephant.

There was a picture of wild elephants playing in the river valley in my hotel room. Asking around, I was told that it was taken by the principal of the local Elephant School.

The Elephant School of the Wild Elephant Valley Forest Park is where elephants are domesticated and trained. There are wonderful elephant performances every day to entertain people who cannot see them in the wilderness. On the school training ground I saw a tall strong man with a square face busy working, a camera hanging from his shoulder. I walked up and asked for the principal. Sure enough, it was him.

Since principal Liu was an amateur photographer, so we hit it off immediately. We talked about everything from elephants to photography, and finally, he suggested that I go herd elephants in the mountains with the trainers. He said that once elephants are taken to the mountain, they may become so wild that people cannot tell they

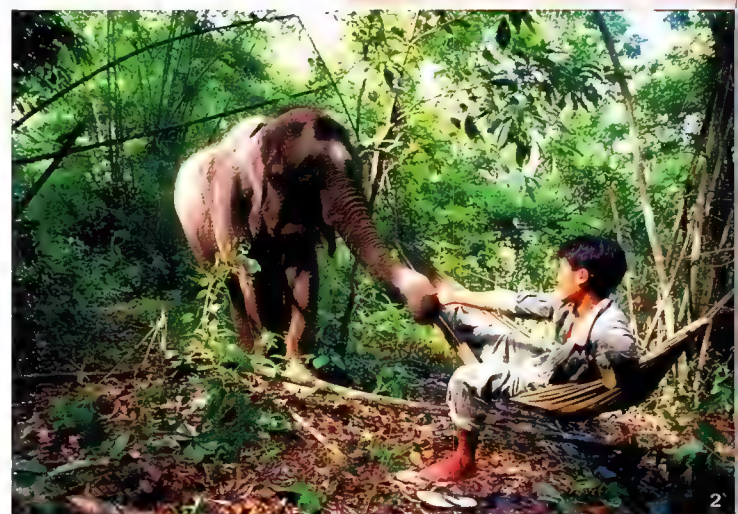
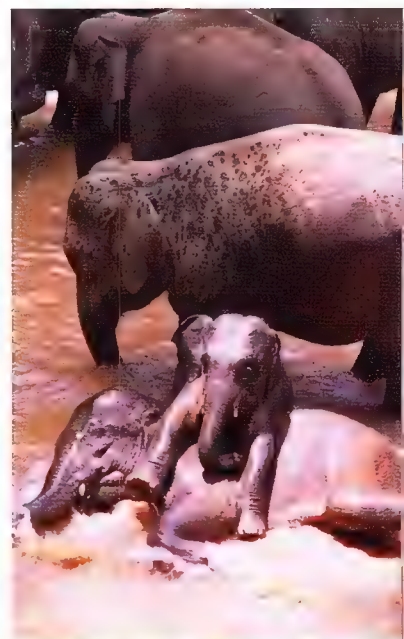
had been domesticated before.

Herding was a new challenge for me, for I had never herded even a cow before in my life. If I could herd elephants on the mountain, I would have something to boast about back in the city.

Chongbao-the-Elephant: A Desperate Fight to Save Its Master

Our elephant group was driven by four trainers. Together with Liu I sat on an elephant named Chongbao, who had once saved Liu's life. These two built a special animal-human bond, and Liu often talked with it in "elephant language".

Last June, when Liu was herding Chongbao on the mountain, he let it graze in the valley while he was reading under a tree. Suddenly a group of 13 wild elephants appeared from the woods. The elephants saw Liu and a baby elephant bellowed in fear. Out of the instinct to protect the baby, three adult female elephants charged him. Liu



hurried to climb up the tree, but the female elephants attacked the mere half-a-metre-thick trunk in turn, so the tree began to sway precariously. Liu broke into a cold sweat, but all he could do was clinged tightly to the tree. At this moment, Chongbao charged toward the tree. Carrying a log with its trunk, Chongbao wielded it left and right, while letting out a tremendous bellow. The wild elephants were confused for a moment, so they retreated for about 30 m. Normally domesticated elephants are afraid of the wild elephant, but in order to save its trainer, Chongbao attacked instead. Chongbao dashed to the

tree, stretched up its trunk and lifted Liu onto its back. Then it ran at top speed back to the Elephant School, rescuing Liu from danger.

The Return of the Prodigal Son

After our elephant group got to the mountain, the five elephants disappeared quickly in the dense forest. Liu and another two trainers each hung a hammock from the trees, swaying leisurely to and fro. Another trainer took a sickle to get some grass for the elephants. Since they are big eaters, the elephants are given four meals a day, and they still have to graze in the mountains twice a day to replenish enough nutrients. I looked around the forest, thinking that if I met with what had happened to Liu, I couldn't even climb up the tree, to say nothing of having an elephant like Chongbao to save me. Liu might have read my thoughts, so he told me just to relax and take my pictures.

Among the elephants, the one with chains was called Xianmeng. It

was spirited away by a group of wild elephants five years earlier while grazing on the mountains. Eight months later, three groups of wild elephants came to the Wild Elephant Valley, some 30 in all.

Their tremendous terrifying bellows reverberated in the valley. Hearing the news, Liu rushed over to take pictures. By instinct he felt that one of the elephants in his lens looked very much like the lost Xianmeng. So he yelled out its name, and the elephant seemed to respond in a way. Then he gave instructions, asking it to squat and retreat, and the animal obeyed his commands. Overjoyed, Liu told someone to get two carts of bananas to entice Xianmeng to leave the wild elephants. Yet before Xianmeng could walk 10 m away, the guard elephant called him back to the group. Liu didn't give up. He tried to talk to Xianmeng in "elephant language" every now and then, waiting for a chance. After it became dark, Liu tried to entice Xianmeng again to a big tree when the guard elephant didn't notice because of its poor eyesight. Chaining Xianmeng gently to the tree, he mounted lightly onto the elephant, and then talked with Xianmeng in its language, reminding it of the good memories of the Elephant School. Before long Xianmeng submitted, and the elephant lost for eight months finally returned to the school.

Back at school, Xianmeng was able to give performances it had learned previously after only a little training, and he also learned some new tricks. Sometimes he also showed some of the wild elephant's temper and refused to follow orders, but it never hurt anyone. Judged by the school standard, he is a good elephant with strong personality. Every time they went herding in the mountains, the trainers would always attach a chain to one of its feet, just in case the virgin forest or the wild elephants drew him back to the memory of savagery and wilderness.

I summed up my courage and hiked into the dense forest to pat the elephants. Huang shouted from time to time in the "elephant language" to remind the elephants to come back to the trainers, before disappearing again in the forest to continue their feast.

At sunset we called back our charges and went back mounted on the elephants.

Even though I didn't find any trace of wild elephant during this trip, but I brought back with me a rich memory of the wilderness in the mountains.

1. Wild elephants playing in the Sancha River. (By Qiu Kaipei)
2. The elephant and its trainer are like brothers. (By Li Zhixiong)
3. Spectacular views from the cable tram. (By Chen Yinian)
4. Elephant trekking through the dense forest. (By Li Zhixiong)



Splashing Out in Xishuangbanna

Photos by Guo Jianshe, Chan Yat Nin
Article by Guo Jianshe

The Water Splashing Festival celebrated in April

is the merriest time of the year for the people of Xishuangbanna. The grand ceremony held in April 2003 to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, doubled the significance of the occasion.

April 12: A Dai Meal on the Lancang Riverside

I came to attend the celebrations of this 50th anniversary. One evening, together with a few friends, old and new, I had a Dai-style barbecue in a restaurant on Golden Sand Beach on the Lancang River. The aroma of various herbs and spices drifted in the air, sharpening my appetite. In our group was a man who had come to Xishuangbanna for the first time. Seeing the dishes of many colours — green, yellow, white and black — he frowned, a doubtful expression on his face. Again and again, he questioned, "Is it good? Are you sure it's delicious?" "Of course," one of the locals answered. "Do you know why very few people want to leave Golden Sand Beach to work elsewhere? It's

because they cannot live without the food here." At this moment, the restaurant owner served us a dish of white meat. The guy who frowned immediately switched his seat to stay as far away as possible. This was a dish of cooked worms, which were actually quite nutritious. I was drunk the first time I tried them. Before I realized what the dish was, I had picked up a mouthful with my chopsticks, and found it delicious. Since then, I seemed to be addicted to it.

1. Don't bother showering before you go to the Water-Splashing Festival in Ganlanba. (By Guo Jianshe)
2. A Dai girl plays the unique bottle gourd flute. (By He Ruiguang)
3. Graceful Dai dancers (By Guo Jianshe)



Splashing Out in Xishungbanna

April 13: Charming Ladies at the Rural Market

As the people in Beijing visiting the temple fairs as part of Spring Festival celebration, the Dai people visit the rural markets during the days of the Water Splashing Festival.

Long before we arrived at the town, we heard the typical beats of Dai music. After parking our car, we entered the colourfully decorated street, following the flow of the crowd. Stalls set in the shade of the trees were selling various food, including some rare specialties, such as fried ox skin, cake made of white flowers and rice milk, beef wrapped in banana leaves and roasted chicken on bamboo sticks, as well as white, purple and yellow rice. As the weather was hot, cold rice pudding was the best seller. It tasted sour and spicy, and the vegetables and sauce also looked attractive. I bought a bowl for one yuan and, following the others' example, added various spices from a dozen bottles. No wonder a friend of mine, who is a native of Xishuangbanna but works in Beijing, told me that every time she visits her hometown, the first thing she does is to visit a food stand for rice pudding. "You can be tired of any gourmet dish, but never your native food," she said.

People on the street all spoke the Dai

language, which I could not understand.

The rural market was presenting a fashion show. The Dai girls all wore adornments on their heads or on their clothes, using all the beautiful colours available in nature. They looked like peonies blossoming in the garden. For me, it was the first time that I had seen so many pretty girls in the sunshine at one time. I was lucky to have a colour film in my camera. These young ladies



were so beautiful and attractive that I marveled at Mother Nature's generosity to them.

"Water! Water..." Someone yelled from the crowd. I looked towards the noise and saw a parade of people singing and dancing as they came towards us. In the front row were four young men, of whom two carried xiangjiao (elephant-foot) drums. When they walked, they kicked their feet in different directions to resemble the gait of an elephant. The other two, who had feathers fixed to their backs, danced with their arms moving back and forth. These are the Dai people's two favourite dances, the Elephant-Foot Drum Dance and the Peacock Dance. As only male peacocks have beautiful feathers, men always perform the Peacock Dance. Behind the four young men were a bunch of boys and girls, all in colourful costumes, dancing in pairs. When the parade reached the open ground, boys and girls were separated. The girls all took out their embroidered purses and looked among the boys for someone they liked. Then, lightly, they threw the purses to the boys, who would fight to catch them. This game is the way Dai girls choose their lovers.

April 14: Dragon-Boat Racing and Rockets

My friend woke me very early, telling me that there would be a dragon-boat race on the river. When we arrived, the banks were already crowded. The girls were as beautiful, but the focus was on the rowers. All bare-chested, each of them wore a scarf in the colour of his team. As boat racing requires strict coordination among the rowers, the team leader, who stands at the stern and gives orders, plays the key role in making sure all the rowers move

at the same pace.

The race started and I saw several slender dragon-boats set off from the opposite bank. "Hai-oh, hai-oh!" The young rowers cried while their oars moved up and down in unison. Their boats glided swiftly across the river towards our side. Though it was a contest, winning seemed unimportant. On the beach, bamboo tables had been laid with wine and food. Whatever the result, all the rowers would happily enjoy the meal. There was no arrogance among the winners, or disappointment among the losers.

The sun got hotter in the afternoon, but I did not want to leave because I was waiting for the launch of "high rise", or homemade rocket. The Dai people filled a piece of bamboo tube with gunpowder and fixed it to a long bamboo pole. Two men carried the pole onto the makeshift launch pad and fired it. The rocket flew high with a pleasant whistle.

That night, there was a gala gathering in the square of Jinghong. Those who did not get a chance to dance in the parade continued dancing in the evening. Children set off fireworks called "Dai sparks", which gushed out red flames. "Kong Ming Lamp" was another game played in the evening. When lit, the lamps made of paper would rise and drift in the sky like stars. In this way, people prayed for happiness and peace.

1. Lift off for "high rise", a home-made bamboo rocket. (By Guo Jianshe)
2. Both men and women of the Dai ethnic group like tattoos. (By Xu Yunhua)
3. Dai women bathing in the river (By Yin Xin)
4. Dragon boat race on the Lancang River. (By Guo Jianshe)



Splashing Out in Xishungbanna

April 15: A Soaking in the Sun

For the Dai people, splashing water at each other is a blessing. At 10 a.m., my friends, all dressed for the water splashing, came to my hotel. They persuaded me to leave my camera as they feared the 100,000-yuan equipment would be damaged by water. So I followed suit and dressed lightly. Then, with a plastic basin in hand, I walked hesitantly out the door. It was warm outside, but before I moved a couple of steps, there was cold water splashed on my head. As I stood motionless, puzzled, trying to figure out where the water had come from, another basin of water was poured on me. It took me a while to I realize that I, the guest from afar, was the target. I was completely soaked when I finally found water to fill my basin. Everybody was drenched. I was looking for beautiful girls to splash, and the girls shouted and laughed. Those totally soaked went home to change into dry clothes and came back again, ready for more splashing.

April 16: The Aini People in Nannuo Mountain

Xishuangbanna is home to many ethnic groups who live in harmony. One of the reasons, I think, is that it has enough spaces for each of the communities. The Dai people who love water, for example, have built their houses on the flat land by rivers; the Aini people occupy the slopes; and the Va people choose to stay on the top of the mountains. All of them are farmers, but there have been few conflicts.



The people known as Aini belong to the ethnic group of Hani. Unlike the Dai girls who dress colourfully, the Aini girls wear black. Their skin is naturally tanned. They wear thigh-length black skirts made of rough cotton and they wrap the lower part of their legs with black strips. Obviously such attires are good for climbing up and down the mountain. Their adornments are concentrated on the head — their silver hats are decorated in various striking colours. When you see a group of Aini girls walking together, you are reminded of a kind of tropical butterfly, which is black all over but has two brilliant sparks on its wings.

Nannuo Mountain is actually a mountainous area with low hills, where more than a dozen Aini villages are scattered. The Dai people named it Nannuo because it used to be covered with luxuriant bamboo



groves. In the Dai language, "nan" means watery and juicy and "nuo" means bamboo shoots. The pickle made of bamboo shoots is also called nannuo. The area is famous for its green tea, black tea and Pu'er tea.

As we climbed up the Nannuo Mountain with our tour guide, there were a man and a woman, both stark naked, blocked the way. They were wooden statues set there to serve as the village gate. We were told that it was the Aini custom to make a new village gate every year, usually in March or April. To the Aini, the village gate protects them from disaster, disease and evil spirits, and guarantees peace and safety all year round.

We stopped at the gate and dared not enter the village. We were not scared by the sacrificial ceremony dispersing evil spirits, but by the



Aini girls standing in a row, each holding a bamboo tube of wine. Experience told me that we would have to finish all the wine they offered before we were allowed to enter their village.

Seeing our hesitation, our guide took a tube and drank it all up, without spilling a drop. When he finished, he wiped his mouth and murmured, "Great tea." It turned out that the bamboo tubes were filled with tea instead of wine, and there was nothing to worry about. We immediately followed suit and emptied the tubes. The tea was the perfect restorative in the heat.

It was the New Year* of the Aini people. Like the Chinese Lunar New Year, it is a festival to celebrate the renewal of life. In the past, the celebration would last for 15 days, including a sacrificial ceremony for the ancestors, many feasts and parties. Now the celebration has been shortened, but it has more events. We roamed in the village and saw every household preparing for the New Year, slaughtering pigs and chickens, making zanba rice cake, brewing rice wine and so on. Everyone was smiling. Several strong men were killing an ox. After they cut off its hide, they invited an elder to divide the meat among the villagers. The

old man spread banana leaves on the ground and cut the meat into many pieces.

1. The crossbow competition is one of the highlights of the festival. (By Chan Yat Nin)
2. The colourful attires of Aini women. (By Guo Jianshe)
3. Aini people still use primitive methods to winnow millet and rice. (By Chan Yat Nin)
4. The two wooden statues that stand at the Aini village gate. (By Chan Yat Nin)



Splashing Out in Xishungbanna



April 17: Dancing to the Great Drum

As a photographer, I find the lifestyle of this ethnic group very attractive. Every time I visit Xishungbanna, I ask my friend to take me to the Jinuo community. Scattered in the forests on Jinuo Mountain are more than 40 villages of the Jinuo people. Fortunately, the villagers were celebrating their Blacksmith Festival** when I was there. The name may sound strange, but when you think about the history of the

Jinuo, you understand why they celebrate such a festival. It was only recently that the Jinuo people joined modern society and abandoned their primitive way of life.

Due to delays on the road, the significant ceremony of the Ox Killing was over when we arrived at the village on Jinuo Mountain. The bloody carcass lay on the ground, skinned. The ox is fastened to a tree and the young Jinuo men throw their spears at it in turn, until blood pours out and the animal falls to the ground.

Since we had missed the Ox Killing, I hurried to a flatland outside the village to see the performance of Great Drum Dance. Drums are sacred to the Jinuo people. According to legend, when Amoyaobai, the almighty creator of Jinuo people, poured water to nourish all life in the world, it actually initiated floods that drowned the humans. Amoyaobai immediately made a huge drum and let the only survivors, Mainai and his sister Mainiu, hide inside. After the deluge, the two had children and the Jinuo tribe prospered from generation to generation. As a tradition, the Jinuo people





perform the Great Drum Dance to honor Amoyaobai.

In the past, a big Jinuo family used to live under the same roof of a long house. However, since they have adopted Han customs, the big houses are no longer their residences, but are preserved as a symbol of their primitive society.

Though their houses have changed, their marriage customs remain the same. Young men and women choose their own lovers. After a period of secret courtship, they announce their relationship and eventually move in together. The time for the wedding depends on their economic circumstances. For better-off families, the weddings come soon, but for those with financial difficulties, the wedding can be postponed to buy time to prepare. It is admirable that they take such a generous and understanding attitude towards marriage, respecting the nature of love. Compare with the modern people who delve into internet courtship, the young men and women on Jinuo Mountain are much more simple and direct. They can still express love by presenting their beloved with an innocent gift of a leaf or a flower. I hope the Jinuo tradition will live on.

Note 1: The New Year, Gatangbo, of the Aini people varies in different places. This prefecture celebrates it from January 2 to 4. The festival in which the writer took part was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

Note 2: Blacksmith Festival, or Temoke (meaning "all people forge iron"), is the New Year festival of the Jinuo ethnic group. It is said that a woman was pregnant for nine years and nine months, and when the baby was eventually born, he could strike iron with a hammer. Then he was revered as the first blacksmith. The festival is generally celebrated in the first month of the lunar calendar. The Blacksmith Festival mentioned here was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

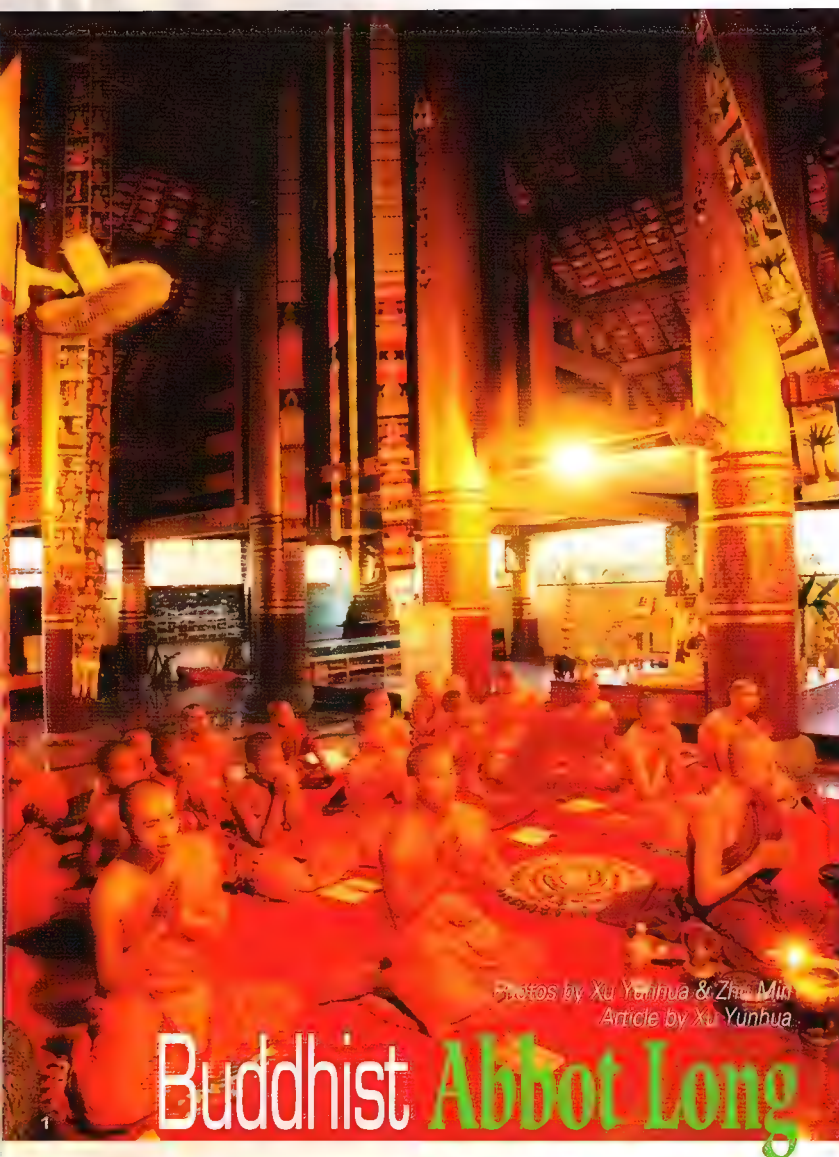


1. The Jinuo people are the last ethnic group identified in China. (By Guo Jianshe)
2. The Jinuo people beat drums and dance to honor the ancestor goddess. (By Chan Yat Nin)
3. During the celebration of Blacksmith Festival, people sing and dance along the street. (photo by Chan Yat Nin)

From a Buddhist Abbot to a Family Man

The unique customs and harmonious relationships in Xishuangbanna have led to many interesting romantic stories, especially when the stories involve monks.

It is not uncommon for monks to resume secular life, but not every one of them could handle the pressure of the worldly life. To them, life is like a turbulent sea; the more fortunate one, however, have settled down, started a business, and found true love.



Photos by Xu Yunhua & Zhu Min
Article by Xu Yunhua

Buddhist Abbot Long

I have a peculiar friend named Yan Wenlong who is of the Dai ethnic group. He was tonsured at the age of 13, and became an abbot at 20. Now 25 years old, he was held in esteem in the village because of his senior statue.

The First Call from Long

When Long had just reached the age of 20, he said to me, "Come to my house tomorrow with your camera, take some pictures for me, and be sure to bring your car." He didn't tell me what for, but I guessed that there must be something important going on.

The next day, a friend and I drove my Mitsubishi to meet him for this mysterious appointment. When we arrived at the gate of his house, he was standing there to welcome us. "I heard your car when you entered the village. It's wonderful, please come upstairs for a drink. Today I am going to become the abbot."

According to traditional Dai custom, when a boy is about 10 years old, he must have a godfather to hold a grand ceremony for him to be tonsured into a temple, where he will study the Dai language and Buddhist rules. When he is 20 years old and is still in the temple, he should find another godfather to hold the ceremony when he is promoted to a Buddhist abbot. This is an important event, so usually relatives and friends are invited for a feast that will bring dignity to the family. In recent years there have been fewer such occasions, because most children who have been tonsured return to the secular world and go to school. Their parents have realized that only by receiving an education can they have a better future.

Long was brought up in Myanmar. At the age of 13 he was sent to a temple by his godfather to become a monk. He moved with his mother to their relative's house when he was 16. Because he was not registered as a resident, he could only be a monk, but he was content with such a life.

Long let us go upstairs to sit at a conspicuous dinner table — a seat for the guest of honor. No doubt such an honor and status came mostly from the car and the camera. After we were settled at the table, Long went to sit cross-legged on a luxuriant cushion in the main hall, waiting solemnly to receive homage from the people.

There were many villagers in his bamboo house, some busy with cooking, some drinking heavily, and many more were coming with the same gifts: two pieces of wax wrapped in brocade together with five to ten yuan. Those with gifts would come to a



small table in the main hall, kneel down, and place their palms together before their chest, while listening to the chanting of scriptures by an elderly man. After that, they put the pieces of wax and money on the table, and then found a seat to enjoy the feast. I asked an elderly man about the meaning of this ritual. He told me that the wax and money were presents to congratulate Long on his promotion to abbot. The wax wrapped with brocade showed respect.



because it was also the day for him to ordain his godson. Long carried his godson who was sitting in the main hall to the balcony, took a razor and gave him a perfect shave — as bald as an egg.

Long had his godson sit below a trough prepared earlier. Relatives and friends coming for the ceremony all crowded around, ladling water from a bucket into the trough. The water poured onto his godson was to

wash away worldly dirt.

According to local custom, Long carried his newly dressed godson downstairs at about 5 p.m. Just as he reached the foot of the stairs, he felt that there was something missing — something festive and fun. Suddenly he realized that the drum and gong team hadn't showed up. When someone told him that the Elephant Feet Drum Team was hired by some other people, Long became instantly furious, "Who dares to take the drum team from me? Don't you know that the abbot should be honoured as Chairman Mao? You idiots! I'll go get it myself!"

As a friend of Long for years, I had never seen him so angry. In less than 10 minutes, Long came back carrying the Elephant Feet Drum, sweat dripping from his head as he chattered in the Dai dialect all the time. His relatives and friends got the drum from him and began to strike. Long carried his godson and teetered to the temple. It was only then his face showed a trace of a smile.

Early the next morning, Abbot Long held the ceremony for the young monks. The melodious scripture chanting could be heard at the entrance of the village. All the boys were changed from their secular attires into cassocks, and they were all given Buddhist names. Finally, the boys were ordained together in front of the statue of Sakyamuni after chanting of scriptures. From then on, they formally became monks.

The Second Call From Long

As we were all busy with our lives, I didn't see Long for about a year. One day, I got a ring from him again, "Come to my house tomorrow, bring your camera and be sure to drive your car." The call was the same as the one I received a year before, only this time the display on my telephone indicated that he called from a mobile phone.

The next day, I went to meet him driving the same Mitsubishi, only the car was more beat-up and made even louder noises than before. He greeted us at his door as usual. This was the first time since he became the abbot that he would hold a ceremony to ordain a boy into the temple.

Before the Dai boys were formally tonsured into a temple, they had to be probationary monks. This meant that they were to shave bald, and to live in a Burmese temple, but they did not have to wear the cassock. When they finished learning the scriptures, they would become monks. There were four boys to be tonsured on that day, so the whole village was filled with festivity. Long was especially elated

The Third Call from Long

Another year passed before I got a ring from Long again. He said that he had rented a house in town and was running a BBQ restaurant. I was puzzled about this and wondered why a Buddhist abbot was doing business in town instead of his duties in the temple.

His BBQ restaurant was located at a place where the urban and rural areas meet. When I saw Long, he wasn't wearing the cassock anymore, but strangely, a colorful shirt and a pair of shorts. Thick hair had grown on his head, and there was even a girl by his side. He looked nothing like a Buddhist abbot at all!

1. Monks chant Buddhist scriptures every morning. (By Xu Yunhua)
2. The villagers kneel before Long, who was their spiritual leader at that time. (By Xu Yunhua)
3. After the feast, relatives and friends carry Long to the temple surrounded by a cheering crowd. (By Xu Yunhua)

From a Buddhist Abbot to a Family Man



After a few glasses of wine, Long told me about his experience in the past year. He had resumed to secular life six months earlier. However, having been a monk since childhood, he knew nothing about farming. To make a living, he used up his savings laid aside when he was the abbot and went to town to start a small business. He found a girlfriend in a Dai village at the city outskirts, but life was hard for the two of them. Before we parted, Long was thoroughly embarrassed when asked a favor from me, "Can you get my small restaurant a signboard with neon light? I don't know where I can get it, nor how much it will cost."

A few days later, I sent him a big neon light signboard, with a rather worldly name "Friend's BBQ". According to the custom of the Dai ethnic group, after an abbot resumes to secular life, the character Du at the beginning of his name must be changed to "Kanglang". So Du Wenlong was transformed to Kanglang Wenlong, and he could get married.

Another six months later, Long told me that he was getting married. After staying in the city for a while, he just couldn't go back to the country again. So he planned to live in his fiancée's home. He wanted to have a wedding in style and hoped that we could find two cars to transport his relatives and friends from the village for the celebration in town.

On his wedding day, we drove a rented minibus and my poor Mitsubishi to the village early in the morning. After some firecrackers were let off, Long came out of his bamboo house, carrying a silk scarf as a present for his bride. A couple of 100-yuan notes were half visible in his thin shirt pocket. Obviously Long had dressed up carefully. Judging from his appearance, no one could imagine that he was from the country.

We stopped at the bride's home, a Dai-style bamboo house, an hour later. Just as we were about to go upstairs, a dozen girls and women dressed in gorgeous Dai costumes rushed out from the house. Rice wine in hand, they guarded the staircase as they tried to block the groom from entering (this is a traditional wedding game, the friends and relatives of the bride are supposed to tease the groom by making his entrance difficult). Long shouted loudly, "This is the first pass. We must beat them in drinking before we get into the house." Over 20 people in our two cars tried to run upstairs at full tilt as they grabbed the wine and drank. An hour passed before we could move any further. Then the girls upstairs suddenly changed their tactics, "Hahuai, Hahuai (bring us 500

yuan)!" Long was so anxious that he was dripping with sweat. He fished in his shirt pocket but only found three 100-yuan notes that he threw up to the women. There was a stir upstairs, but the way was still blocked. "Hahuai, Hahuai!" The shouts were getting louder. Long became furious. Suddenly, he broke into a temper. Rushing up the stairs, he grabbed a wine bottle and began to swear, as he smashed it heavily on the ground. Every one was dumbfounded by this fury from a former abbot. A road was opened instantly, and after this, no one dared to poke fun at him. Elders immediately began to chant scriptures solemnly and pray for the newly weds in their bedroom.

The Last Call from Long

Not long after the Water Splashing Festival this year, I got another ring from Long, who called from a public telephone. He faltered for quite a while before asking me to go over to his house.

When I entered his house, he was smoking, his head hanging low. I chatted with him and asked if he had anything in mind. He faltered again before coming up with a loan request. "I have to borrow money from you to get rid of my other debts." He finally confessed. I understood how awkward this was for him. In the past, it was always other people who had to ask him for help; he never had to ask anyone for anything. Now that he had come to me for help, he must have been out of options.

Finally he told me the whole story. Last year he learnt that some people in the village were making a lot of money by planting watermelons, so he also got a large piece of land, borrowed 2,000 yuan to buy fertilizer, seed and mulch to grow watermelons. He followed what other farmers did by soaking the seeds in water before wrapping them with a piece of cloth. Keeping the seed wrapped up and warm, he chanted all sorts of scriptures to pray for a good watermelon harvest. But while he was asleep, the seeds dropped out of his quilt so they weren't in bud when planted the next day. Someone told him that he couldn't plant the seeds this way, but he wouldn't believe them, saying that since he had chanted so many scriptures, they were bound to grow. He planted them anyway. After the germination period, not a single sprout appeared. He planted them again in haste, but it was too late, and all he grew was a couple of poor melons. Not only all the money he borrowed was gone, but his creditor was also pestering him repeatedly, each time with more threats. He had no way out, so he thought of me — someone with a regular salary.

The situation was ridiculous, but I tried to comfort him nonetheless, "It is just 2,000 yuan. Be a man and you will make up for the loss in the future." He just kept shaking his head, saying, "I have no skills, what else can I do for a living? I've no money either, not even 200 yuan, I can't start any business." I knew that he would be sadder if he talked more, so I took out my salary of 1,000 yuan and gave it to him.

Now seven months have passed since Long's last call. I guess life must be getting better for the young couple.

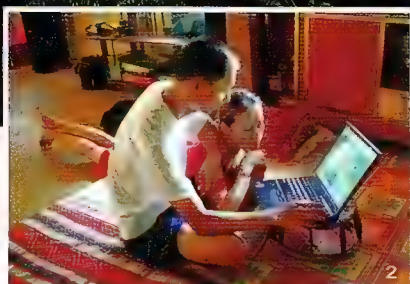


1. The barbecue restaurant ran by Long and his wife (By Xu Yunhua)
2. The benediction from relatives and friends at the wedding of Long (By Xu Yunhua)



Photos and Article by Li Zhixiong

Married to the Land



The gathering was held in Building No. 17 of the Barbecue Town, which the local photographers like to frequent. Bin sat on my right and I felt there was something special about him. When I learned that he was a Guangdong native, but had established a cozy home in a beautiful Dai village, I became curious and hoped very much to visit his family.

A Bouquet of Wine in the Forest

One time, I was invited by a friend of Bin to his house in Mansuoxing Village of Menglilun Town. When we arrived, Bin was making wine with a modern machine outside his bamboo house in typical Dai style. The small stainless steel machine shone in the sun, while the wine coming from a thin tube, gave an attractive aroma. He was making wine out of wheat and sorghum, so he named his product "Two Grain Liquor". The jar was soon full and many villagers came to taste it.

Taking Root in the Land

Bin was born and raised in Guangdong. His grandfather was an

artist of the Lingnan school and his father, a horticultural engineer. When he graduated from high school at the age of 18 in 1984, he narrowly failed the college entrance exam. He then went to work at a shop selling audio spare parts. During the next eleven years, Bin helped his boss to expand the business products from audio equipments to telecommunication facilities and teaching equipment. In addition, he established a bar and a seafood restaurant. Business was booming at that time.

However, before long, he made a huge investment mistake and he suddenly found himself in a financial rut. Running out of options, Bin fled from his hometown.

He settled in Xishuangbanna by chance. Perhaps it was because of the love of nature that he inherited from his grandfather and father, or perhaps it was the vast land of Xishuangbanna that had bewitched him. Anyway, he fell in love with the place.

1. Chengzizhai, a beautiful Dai village in Menglilun Town (By Li Zhixiong)
2. Bin and Yiwang have left the noisy city and settled down in Mansuoxing Village. (By Li Zhixiong)

From a Buddhist Abbot to a Family Man



In the botanic garden in Menglilun, he met Yiwang, a Dai tour guide. Her encouragement moved him deeply: in the rainforest of Xishuangbanna, even a small and seemingly insignificant seed that is fallen in a tree fork could sprout and root deeply in the earth. Its branches growing against the tree, and it would eventually become a huge tree itself. The seed that the beautiful Dai girl sowed in his heart inspired Bin to start his own business once more.

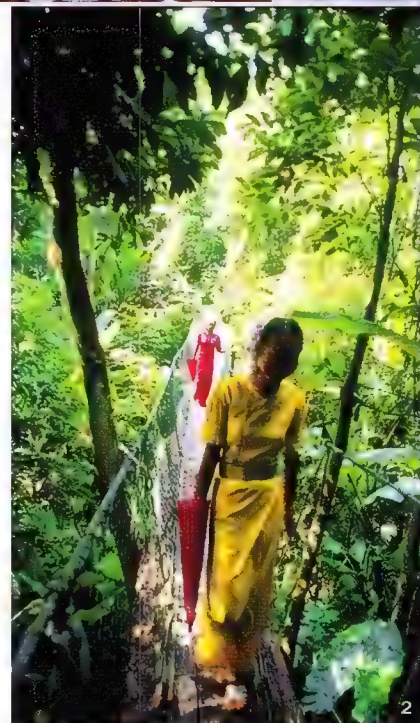
When he went back to Guangdong, he withdrew from the company and sold his restaurant and bar. Three months later, he was in Xishuangbanna again, bringing with him all the money he had made in the past years. With the support of friends in the Xishuangbanna Nature Reserve, he started the virgin forest eco-tours in the rainforests. In three years, he developed the Xishuangbanna Rainforest Valley, an AA scenic spot.

Four years on, the man from the busy metropolis, has become Yiwang's husband and settled in the Dai Village. He has learned from the Dai people the joy of living in harmony with nature and keeping a tranquil life.

Yiwang is from an ordinary farming family. Her parents and younger

brother farm their 0.2-ha paddy field, and 1.3 ha of rubber grove and fruit trees. They also raise chickens, ducks and pigs. After graduating from high school, Yiwang went to work in the Menglilun Botanic Garden. In 1999, she was chosen to work as a tour guide at the World Horticulture Expo in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province. She stands out in the small village because she is worldlier. She quit her job after marriage and works as Bin's personal guide when he visits villages to learn about Dai customs.

The village of Mansuoxing is near the Luosuo River, so Bin



bought a rubber dinghy, the first of its kind used as a fishing boat on the river. Though a skilled fisherman, Bin's father-in-law felt dizzy on this "soft boat" and the fishing net he spread would not open. Yet, he practiced constantly until he mastered the new technique. When we visited, the old man happily went fishing to treat us. Unfortunately, he could not catch much, except a small fish in the last net. But even this symbolic catch escaped and jumped back to the river when I took a photo of him with his fish hung on the net.

Captured by the "Motionless Film"

Though there was no catch from the river, we still had fish on the table. It was home-preserved sour fish, a famous delicacy in Menglilun Town. I was lucky to have both the "Two Grain Liquor" and the sour fish in one day. Bin is a skillful photographer who can catch the feeling and spirit of the landscape. After a few drinks, we started talking about

Following a Trail Cut by Royalty

I passed by the Rainforest Valley on my way back to Jinghong. It was during the 10 days that Bin was working there, so I drove in to have a look of the scenic spot that he had established.

The Rainforest Valley is actually a small part of the 240,000-ha primeval forest designated as the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve. Its 89-ha links with the Philip Trail, the 1,000-m-long trail opened personally by Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth's husband and the president of the World Wildlife Foundation.

In 1986, Queen Elizabeth visited Kunming. Her husband, Prince Philip, is an enthusiastic environmentalist. When he heard that there was a large rainforest in Xishuangbanna, he insisted on seeing it. Deep inside the Menglun Nature Reserve, he opened a trail of 1,000 m before eventually catching a glimpse of the rain forest that was totally out of his expectation.

It was this small trail that had attracted Bin and encouraged him to develop the Rainforest Valley.

In the Rainforest Valley, you can find everything that exists in a rainforest. Walking along the narrow roads, you can admire the trees and plants; in the air corridor, walking among trees centuries old, you can observe the grand upper-level ecology of the rainforest. The forest extends like a waving sea.

Only then did I understand why Bin chose to be a son-in-law of Xishuangbanna.

1. Bin's father-in-law casts his fishing net from his new rubber boat. (By Li Zhixiong)
2. Visitors have a bird's-eye view of the tropical rainforest from the air corridor. (By Li Zhixiong)
3. Bin's staffs are all from the minority ethnic groups in the nearby villages. (By Li Zhixiong)
4. Bin bought the first rubber boat used for fishing on the Luosuo River. (By Li Zhixiong)

photography. We looked at slides, and many of Yiwang's friends, who work as tour guides in Bin's company, came to visit. They were very interested in the "motionless film" and came to watch whenever Bin and his friends gave slide shows in his house.

Bin divides a month into three. He spends 10 days working in the Rainforest Valley; 10 days living in Jinghong, where he has bought an apartment, to catch up with the outside world; and 10 days at home in the countryside to relax. He plans to help a few households in each of the villages to develop family inns so visitors can taste the rural life in a comfortable bamboo house.





Photos by Xu Yunhua Article by Wu Xuan

The Wild Taste of Xishuangbanna Food



A Bloody Surprise

When the "Baiwang" dish was served, it scared me. It was nothing but a lump of solidified blood. To help me overcome my fear, my Dai friend took a big spoonful and ate it. He told me how it was made. When a pig is slaughtered, the blood is saved in a basin and stirred until it gets cold to prevent it from solidifying. In another container, salt, hot pepper, peanuts, ginger, garlic, coriander and sauce made of cooked pork and chicken meat

The food of the minority ethnic groups in Xishuangbanna carries the distinctive wild tastes as it is processed in the most natural and simple ways. This cuisine cannot be found outside of Xishuangbanna, so I mustered up the courage to try some of the dishes on the so-called "Rustic Menu".

are prepared. The blood is added, then water, and it is stirred smoothly until it solidifies naturally. It is served as an appetizer. Though looking bloody, it tastes good, cool and spicy, and melts in the mouth.

Eating What the Ox Has Eaten

You may only want to try the dish if you're told that it can help purge your body of toxins. Called "Sapie" in the Dai language, the dish is made from a section of ox intestine near the stomach just after the beast is slaughtered. The intestine is then boiled in water, and when the soup turns green, spices and meat sauce are added until the intestine is done. The dish tastes a little bitter. It seems that the intestine should have been cleaned before cooking, but the Dai people believe it is the contents of the stomach that they need to eat.

Barbecued Pig's Eyes

Beside the "Barbecued Pig's Eyes" on the menu



were dishes such as "Barbecued Pig's Brain" and "Barbecued Ox Spinal Marrow". The local people certainly know how to make the best use of everything. I went to see how the dishes were made, as the chef wrapped each eyeball in a banana leaf, adding hot pepper, ginger, garlic, coriander, and salt. He then put them on bamboo sticks and barbecued them on the fire. It was hard for me to take the first bite though, as there seemed to be many pigs staring at me. But when I thought I might not have another chance if I did not try it, I braced myself and took a bite. It was unusually juicy and delicious. I ended up finishing several of them.

I think only the true adventurers can taste the best of Dai food. Of course, there are also tender dishes on the Dai menu, such as roasted chicken and fish, fried ox skin and stewed wild vegetables. Most of the dishes have characteristic flavors of sour, hot, bitter and aromatic. The locally produced spices, including a kind of sweet grass and coriander, give them a distinctive flavour.

Among the common Dai dishes, I also like the crispy fried ox skin, the refreshing roasted fish and the spicy chicken (Ganbai).

Food Street

Apart from rustic food, you can also find places that offers more sophisticated cuisine in Xishuangbanna. Manjinglan, in Jinghong, is such a food street.

Situated at the entrance of the food street is a Thai restaurant named Caichunqing. I chose to try it simply because I found its name strange.

It is a small, plainly furnished restaurant, but it look clean and bright. All of its crockery and cutlery are wrapped in clean paper. Thai pop songs are played on the radio, adding an exotic ambience. Here you can have typical Thai-style dishes such as "Pork Steamed with Lemon", "Fried Moss" and "Roast Eel". The staff can pour you a glass of wine from the jar with a processed snake. My favourites are the chicken fried rice, lemon and cucumber with cold rice noodles. Other dishes with rice are all as good.

Opposite Caichunqing is another Thai restaurant, James, in a bamboo building. At the top of the stairs, two wooden figures clad in Thai costume greet the customers with their palms pressed to their

chests. On the wall near the window, a mask is hung ward off evil spirits. In the center of the room, a statue of Buddha is enshrined. There is also a picture of the owner taken with the Buddha. Amazingly, the lamp-covers of the restaurant are made from the baskets used by fishermen in Thailand.

The local people always dress up when they come to this restaurant, in accordance with its elegant environment. Only the backpacking foreign travellers eat here in casual dress.

The owner of James is a Thai man who used to work as a tour guide, and he can speak several languages, including English, Thai, Laotian, Japanese and Cantonese.

There are good reasons for the restaurant's success: its stylish ambience and its gourmet dishes. I love its fried rice in particular.

Finding Love in a Strange Land

Meimei Cafe is a well-known bar, partly because three of its previous owners have married foreigners and moved, one to England, one to Iceland and the other to Germany. The women are all from the same village, Gelang, a community of the Aini people. I heard that they are not pretty, but perhaps Western men like their unpolished nature. More amazingly, the current boss is going to marry a foreigner too. I wanted to talk to her, but she was too busy serving customers. I secretly wish her luck and happiness.

Meimei Cafe is extremely popular. Foreigners visit it even during the daytime. Its decor is very simple, but unique: the walls are patterns made of thin bamboo, the tablecloths with red and black stripes are made by the minority people, and the grass-hat-like lamp-covers create a cozy atmosphere for chatting couples. It was here that my French friend found his Israeli girlfriend.

Its menu is not much different from the others, but the romantic style makes it distinctive.

1. Performers show off their national minority song and dance. (By Xu Yunhua)
2. Barbecue and bamboo tube rice (By Guo Jianshe)
3. Dai music echoes through the night in Hongjing City. (By Li Zhixiong)
4. Spicy chicken (By Chan Yat Nin)
5. Frying cattle skin (By Chan Yat Nin)



The Wild Taste of Xishuangbanna Food



Barbecue under the Headlights

The real nightlife of Jinghong starts at 11 p.m. when many people gather at the large barbecue restaurants.

It is interesting to try Dai-style barbecue. The Xishuangbanna people are addicted to barbecue food. On every occasion, gathering with friends, inviting somebody to dinner, having tea or cold drinks, they must have barbecue food. Even when they sing karaoke or dance in a nightclub, they order food from a barbecue restaurant.

Liuniang Toudeng (Sixth Girl's Headlight) is just such a restaurant. Its barbecue dishes, be they beef, chicken wings, potatoes or bean curd, all taste particularly hot and refreshing.

Usually there are hostesses, each wearing a headlight, roasting meat in the restaurant. The owner of the restaurant is a woman around 50. She is called Sixth Girl because she is the sixth child of her parents. The headlights are normally used by farmers to cut rubber trees at night. Now, the restaurant cleverly uses them in the barbecue room, where the light is dim and smoky.

The Sixth Girl's Headlight has been in business for 10 years and its delivery service has been running for one year. The barbecued snacks, such as beef, pigskin and chicken claw, are all skewered on bamboo sticks and sold at reasonable prices.

The Sixth Girl's two sons are in charge of food delivery. Their delivery service covers a wide area, including bars, nightclubs and guestrooms in hotels, and even as far as the airport 30 km away — the typical Xishuangbanna barbecue food makes the perfect gifts for oversea friends and relatives!

Specialty Dai Cuisine

Dai dishes are rich in national flavour and local colour, and form a unique school of Yunnan cuisine. The ways of preparing their dishes included grilling, steaming, chopping and pickling, altogether 120 varieties. As for the characteristics of the taste, they can be summed up as being sour, pungent, and fragrant. The flavor of glutinous rice cooked in bamboo, fish grilled with sweet grass,

chicken boiled with sour bamboo shoot and fried moss are beyond telling in language or writing unless you taste them yourself.

In Jinghong, there is a picturesque Dai village called Manjinglan, the Dai Nationalities Flavor Food Street. Here in recent years the Dai people opened many restaurants for tourists. Among the various Dai recipes, the more popular dishes are the pineapple rice, grilled fish wrapped in lemon grass, glutinous rice cooked inside the hollow of the bamboo stalk, steamed minced pork wrapped in banana leaves, steamed brain of pig, deep fried banana, cattle skin and moss.

Fragrant Bamboo Rice

Also called bamboo stalk rice, it is made from November to February when the bamboo is fully-grown. Rice is then put inside the hollow of the bamboo stalk and cooked over an open fire till it is done. The bamboo rice is fragrant in smell, soft and fine in texture. It is usually used to entertain guests as staple food.

Fish Boiled with Sour Bamboo Shoots

Sour bamboo shoots, indispensable in the Dai kitchen, can be used as seasoning ingredient or as a dish. The Dai people take young bamboo shoots in spring, cut them into fine slices and pickle them. Fish boiled with sour bamboo shoots is a favorite dish of the Dai. To prepare it, fry the sour bamboo shoots for a short while, add suitable amount of water, and when the water boils, put the fish into the sour soup. When the fish is done, add some green pepper. The dish is ready in a moment. It is tasty and appetizing. Chicken, spare ribs and beef can be cooked in the same way.

Recommended shops and bars in Jinghong City:

1. **Caichunqing:** Mangjinglan Village, Mangting Road, Jinghong City
Tel: (691) 216 1758
2. **Menglihai Tea House:** Development Area, Jinghong City
Tel: 139 8819 9066
3. **James Dai and Thailand Flavor Restaurant:** Mangjinglan Village, Mangting Road, Jinghong City Tel: (691) 216 1462



- 4. Yangguangyan Bar:** Development Area, Jinghong City
Tel: 135 7815 4742
- 5. Gen (Root) Bar:** Mangjinglan Village, Mangting Road, Jinghong City
Tel: (691) 664 6156
- 6. Meigonghe (Mekong River) Bar:** Mangjinglan Village, Mangting Road, Jinghong City Tel: (691) 216 2395

- 7. Meimei Cafe:** Tel: (691) 212 7324
- 8. Liuniang Toudeng Barbecue:** Tel: (691) 662 7977

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- 1. Dai barbecue is the unique cuisine in Xishuangbanna. (Photo by Xu Yunhua)**
- 2. Brace yourself for the gamy Dai cuisine. (Photo by Xu Yunhua)**

Points of Interest in Jinghong

Where to Go?

Xishuangbanna is one of the key scenic resorts of the country. Points of interest are scattered in many locations of the prefecture, all with distinctive features. With the virgin tropical rain forests, rare and precious ornamental plants and wild animals combined with the multifarious peculiar national customs and habits of the people, together with their distinctive residential buildings and garden-like surroundings, the place presents a typically beautiful view of the southern country, and has always been a cherished tourist resort for visitors at home and abroad.

Yunnan Institute Of Tropical Crops

You may reach this institute by passing through a 200-m-long green corridor that composed of oil palms. Surrounded by lush trees and clusters of variegated flowers, it is the second research centre of natural rubber from the three-leaved rubber trees in Brazil.

After more than three decades of development, the institute possesses a land of over 60 ha and a staff of over 1,000 personnel distributed over some ten research departments including seed-breeding, cultivation, harvesting, processing, conservation and other specialties. Its per-tree yield of rubber ranks first in the country.

Remains of The Neolithic Age Found In Xishuangbanna

The cultural contents of the remains from neolithic age are rich and varied, including pottery, stoneware and cowry shells. Several ornaments ground out of seashells found in the remains of Manyun show that the forefathers of the people living here in the primordial society had already developed certain sense of beauty. Even today, the national minority people living here still maintain the custom of using seashells as ornaments. The discovery of the remains of the neolithic age indicates that far back in the olden times of history, there were already Dai people living and multiplying here.

Ganlanba (Olive Basin), A Natural Park

A boat ride from the county seat of Jinghong along the Lancang River for 37 km. will bring you to Ganlanba. Here you will see the river rushing forward forever and flowers blooming all the year round. Buddhist temples and stilted bamboo huts of the Dai people are set off among the coconut palms and other green trees. It is the most representative of the scenery of the subtropical region where the Dai people reside, and is reputed as the "peacocks beautiful tail".

The Buddhist Temple Of Mange Village

The temple is situated in Mange Village in the southwest of Jinghong City. It was built in the year 840 by the Dai calendar (1478). It looks majestic and impressive, with 16 giant pillars measuring 40 cm in diameter and 8 m in height. The whole structure of the temple is joined by mortises and tenons, and not a single nail is used, giving it a distinctive and resplendent appearance. Every year numerous pilgrims come here in a steady stream to pay homage to it, not only

pilgrims at home but also pilgrims and monks from countries in Southeast Asia.

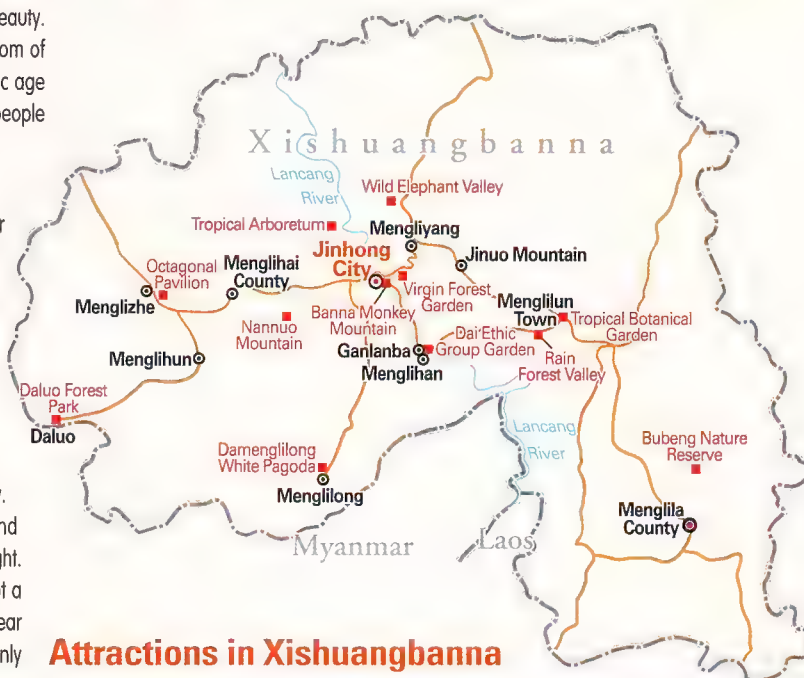
Peacock Lake

Situated in the centre of the county seat, the lake was built in 1977 and later developed into a park, covering an area of 18,700 m². The water in the lake is crystal clear and blue in colour, and is surrounded by myriads of tropical flowers and trees. At the gate of the park are peacocks carved out of stone, and inside the park you will find kiosks and waterside pavilions, a zoological garden, flower beds, and birds and animals such as green peacocks, bears, monkeys, etc., amounting to some 300 in variety.



Manting Park

Situated by Manting Village to the south of the county town at the converging point of the Luosuo River and the Lancang River. The park is a natural forest park. It occupies an area of about 30 ha, and encloses the ancient Manting Temple in the middle. Inside the park are also found the White Pagoda and the Octagonal Pavilion. Ancient trees and various flowers are seen everywhere and deep shades spread under the trees, offering a place for people to linger on during the Water Splashing Festival.



Attractions in Xishuangbanna

An unexpected painful disease, a reader's prayer, and an ancient legend... the beginning of my mysterious journey.



Mysteries of the Grassland Buddha

Photos & Article by Dianna Law

Foreword: In the spring of 2002, I was suddenly struck down by acute sciatica, and thus forced to stay home and worked on line. A caring reader, Ms. Yu, learned about this and called her friend, a lama at Tagong Temple in Sichuan Province, asking him to light a butter lamp in front of the statue of the Buddha and pray for me. It was done without my knowledge, but strangely enough, I was soon recovered from the disease.

The Weight of History

Tagong (meaning "the place Buddha loves") Temple is a lamasery of the Saga Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It is situated on the Tagong

Grassland, 110 km west of the county seat of Kangding, Sichuan Province. Legend has it that more than 1,500 years ago, a princess (Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty) left the central plains to get married in Tibet, she brought with her three Sakyamuni Buddha statues. As she and her troops passed through the Tagong Grassland, one of the statues suddenly became very heavy. Nothing could move it. They realized that it probably indicated Buddha loved the grassland and was reluctant to leave, so they made an imitation of the statue of Sakyamuni and built a temple to enshrine it. After this, the original Buddha statue could be carried again. And so the Tagong Temple came



the station, minibus drivers shouted their destinations to every visitor. On hearing I was going to Tagong Temple, one of them dragged me onto a new minibus. The driver then closed the door and shouted from outside the dark window, "Make yourself comfortable and wait until I get enough passengers. The fare is 10 yuan for a one-way trip." I waited patiently in the vehicle, but there was no sign of other passenger. After 10 minutes, I decided I would not be "locked" up like this, so I took my luggage and left the minibus. The driver would not give up. He told me that if I wanted to hire his vehicle for 80 yuan, he could set off immediately, but I ignored him.

Since I planned to stay only one night at Tagong Temple, I

into being.

The existing temple, however, was built about 200 years ago. The temple has an unusual structure. More than 100 pagodas surround the main buildings, making the formation as a whole magnificent. In the front hall, a statue of the founder of the Saga Sect is enshrined; in the hall on its right, the Juewo Buddha is worshiped in the image of 12-year-old Prince Sakyamuni*. As it is believed that the Buddha always dutifully answers people's prayers, Tagong Temple has become famous and worshipped as a holy land by Tibetans in the surrounding areas.

A grand Buddhist ceremony is held late in the sixth month of the Tibetan calendar annually, when Buddhism followers gather here, walking around the pagodas and reciting sutras while turning praying wheels. From mid-July to early August, there is also a yearly festival celebrated on the grassland.

The Cost of Pilgrimage

One day in spring, I boarded a bus from Chengdu to Kangding early in the morning. The bus drove five hours to reach Xinduqiao and it was 3:30 p.m. when I got off. It was a small town with only one street. At

The Statue of 12-year-old Sakyamuni

Three statues of Sakyamuni were made in his lifetime. As Sakyamuni, founder of Buddhism, was against idolatry, he did not allow the building of temples to enshrine his images. As he was dying, his disciples asked him to leave them his statues for posterity. He agreed to have three statues made, each representing a different age period, and he painted them personally. Of the three, the gilded bronze statue of 12-year-old Prince Sakyamuni, is the most beautiful and solemn. It was brought to China from India, and taken by Princess Wencheng to Tibet. At the site of Tagong Temple, her wooden-wheeled cart became stuck in the sand and could not move. Princess Wencheng decided to leave a statue there for people to worship. As a result, the Tagong Temple was built.

1. The statue of the Juewo Buddha in the image of 12-year-old Sakyamuni, is enshrined in Tagong Temple, Sichuan. (By Yu Qiong)
2. The main entrance to Tagong Temple
3. The newly built Memorial Museum of the Panchen Lama (the second most important figure in Tibetan culture, religion and politics, after the holy Dalai Lama) on Tagong Grassland, with Yala Snow Mountain behind



decided to leave my heavy bags behind. However the town had safekeeping service for luggage, so I left my belongings to the owner of a grocery shop, whom I judged to be honest looking. She agreed without hesitation and carefully took my luggage away. When I told her that I would pay her the next day when I collected it, she was surprised, "How can I charge you for this? I'm helping you and I will take good care of it."

A Haven on the Highland

The shop owner said that since March was the low season, there was little chance of finding other visitors or local worshippers to share a minibus. She offered to find me a car for 30 yuan so I could get there before dark.

The drive took over an hour. On the way, we passed grassland, streams, snow-capped mountains and fortresses. In early spring, the landscape still lacked colour, but it was tranquil. I realized why Buddha found the place captivating.

At dusk, around 6 p.m., I arrived at Tagong Temple. The religious site was not as secluded as I had imagined. Shops, grocery stalls and restaurants lined the short street. The temple was at the end of the street.

Monks with Mod Cons

Before I set off, Ms. Yu had arranged my accommodation at Tagong Temple. She had asked her good friend, a lama named Qupi, to

take me as his guest.

As I approached the shop at the temple entrance, a lama came out to greet me, "You must be Ms. Yu's Hong Kong friend. Come in." The narrow room was equipped with a TV, cassette player and a stove. The lama pointed to a selection of drinks laid by his bed, including Coca Cola, and other soft drinks, asking me to pick one. I pointed at the butter tea brewing on the stove instead.

It was the opening time, so he was busy with customers. Also, there were lamas coming to chat with him. I noticed that almost every lama had a fashionable mobile phone, which he kept almost constantly to his ear. In comparison, my second-handed phone, which I had received as a gift, looked scanty.

At Home with a Lama

When the shop finally closed, I found Qupi and followed him to his home in a typical Tibetan-style house.

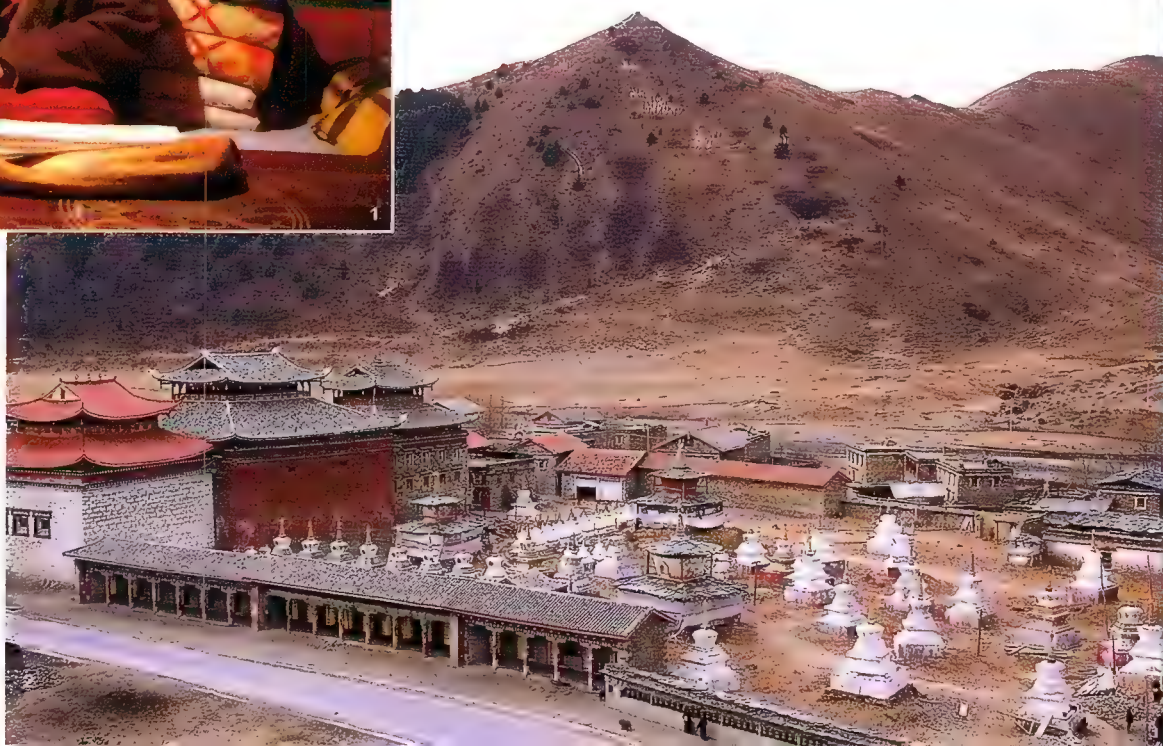
Walking through the courtyard, we entered the ground floor serving as both barn and stable. It smelt of domestic animals and grass. I stepped up to the first floor and was warmly greeted by his family.

Qupi's room had no TV, no cassette player; instead, there were some sutra books, a Buddhist shrine, and several unfinished butter flowers prepared as sacrifices.

Slender as he was, Qupi looked more like a scholar. Like many other local boys, Qupi was sent by his family to study at the temple before he could understand what it meant to be a monk. Besides Buddhism, he also learned Mandarin and became a fluent speaker. Owing to his seniority, Qupi had served as the supervisor of the new lamas for three years before he retired from the post recently. That was why he could move out of the temple to stay with his family. It was hard for me to imagine how such a fragile figure could supervise the new lamas. I laughed and told him, "You don't look like a



1. Lama Qupi chants sutras in the evening.
2. Tagong Temple, pagodas and Holy Mountain form a serene sight.
3. Lamas live in the modern world and they all have mobile phones.





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disciplinarian." He blushed.

After we chatted for a while, he said we should go for dinner since he promised Ms. Yu to take good care of me. Together with a few other lamas, he picked a Sichuan restaurant where they frequently visited. Despite my objections, they ordered a full table of dishes and had the bill paid before I even noticed. I was very grateful for their hospitality.

The Art of Listening

After dinner, I went home with Qupi. Fearing that he might be too shy to speak to a stranger whom he had just met, I talked about myself. Only after I had talked for more than an hour did I finally stop myself, thanks to Qupi's lenient manner. All the time he had been listening to me attentively. He was indeed a highly cultivated monk.

Late that night, Qupi told me that he had to do his evening work, reciting sutras. I asked him to let me stay and he agreed. It was quiet around and I kept silence while he chanted for about half an hour. When he finished, I said, "Your reciting sounds familiar to me."

"It is possible," he replied. "I was the lama who prayed to Juewo Buddha for you. Are you completely recovered?" I had not realized that he was the man who had come to my aid.

Seeing the gratitude on my face, he added, "I'll take you to the Juewo Buddha to express your thanks tomorrow."

Worshipping the Buddha

After butter tea and some breakfast, Qupi took me to the grocery shop to buy incense and offerings. Then he found the lama in charge to open the temple gate for me.

The Juewo Buddha was just inside the gate, looking even more magnificent than in the picture, and I was humbled in its presence. I instinctively bowed three times, following the Tibetan ritual that I had seen before. Then, as I was ordered, I presented my incense and offerings. Lama Qupi even opened the glass door built to protect the statue so that I could worship the Sleeping Buddha up close and even touch his body with my forehead to get more of his blessing. Compared with my previous worshipping experience in overcrowded temples, I was thoroughly spoiled by Qupi.

As I was writing the story, I just realized that the date I visited the Grassland Buddha marked the anniversary of my sudden disease. Was it just a coincidence or another mystery of the Juewo Buddha?

Travel Tips

Transport

Getting there: From Chengdu, take a bus at the Nanmen (South Gate) Bus Terminus to Kangding (eight hours, 110 yuan*).

From Kangding, you can A: take a bus or hire a car to Xinduqiao (two hours, 10 yuan by bus, 20 yuan for a shared minibus); B: take a bus to Garze via Tagong Temple (three hours, 20 yuan).

From Xinduqiao to Tagong Temple, you can either take a bus or hire a minibus (one hour, 10 yuan by bus, 30-40 yuan for a minibus).

Accommodation

Kangding/Xinduqiao: Cheap guesthouses are available near the bus stations, charging 15 yuan for a bed and 30 yuan for a room. Their facilities are simple, with public bathrooms, but not necessarily showers. There are better hotels in Kangding, which may cost 80 yuan or more; Xinduqiao is a small town, so its accommodation is even more rustic.

Tagong Temple: Maoni Hotel inside the temple is a new Tibetan-style building, offering beds on the ground floor for 15 yuan each, and double or four-bed rooms on the upper floor, each bed costing 20-45 yuan. Unusually, it has free shower facilities. There is a place for tea on the balcony and its dining hall serves Tibetan cuisine and basic western food. The hotel also helps its guests in hiring cars, horses and tour guides. Those who want company on the trip can leave a note on the board. There are smaller inns outside the temple. A night in a Tibetan family house costs 10 yuan or more for a bed.



Food

Small restaurants are everywhere, but most of the dishes are hot.

Sightseeing

After visiting the Tagong Temple, you can follow the worshippers touring around the temple and turning the praying wheels, and then go to circle the white pagoda. At the back of the temple is the beautiful Tagong Grassland, where the Panchen Lama Memorial Museum has been recently finished. In the distance is the Yala Snow Mountain.

*US \$1 ~ 8 yuan

Niujie

Snack Capital

Photos by Wang Xiaofei Article by Yang Yajie

Each place has its own characteristic local snacks. There is a saying that "Beijing has the best local snacks in China, the best Beijing snacks come from Muslim cuisine, and the best Muslim snacks are on Niujie (Beef Street)". Niujie, at Guanganmen in the south of Beijing, is the largest Muslim quarter in Beijing.

The rich Muslim culture here has developed distinctive food.

The food culture of Niujie is closely associated with its history. Around the Seventh Century, the Arabs introduced Islam to China. They brought along ground cardamom, pepper, fennel, cinnamon and other spices. By the 11th Century, Muslims began to live in the Niujie area. The changes in politics in the following two centuries resulted in two large migrations of Muslims, and Niujie became one of the places they settled.

For hundreds of

years, Muslim food culture has blended with the local folk culture of Beijing, creating a unique culinary art. Its snacks in particular have almost become a synonym for Niujie. The residents here are good at using spices to cook various meat. They like barbecued food, which is very similar to Arabic cuisine.

Muslim snacks reached their hay day in the 17th Century (Qing Dynasty). The policy at that time discriminated against Muslims in education, and the Muslims in the Niujie area were plunged into poverty. Many people had to pool their money to eke out a living by making snacks. As a result they were known for "living with two knives (one for cutting mutton and one for Qiegao, sticky rice cake slices), and eight ropes (referring to the peddlers' carrying poles with their baskets)". In order to make ends meet, they had to keep improving their craftsmanship. Many snacks therefore became well known, finding favor across the social divides.



Niujie (Beef Street)



Sheep Offal Soup
(Baitang Zasu)



A Muslim peddler

Delicacies from Niujie

There are roughly 200 types of snacks produced in Niujie area. Sweet and spicy peas, salty green beans, various stuffed rice dumplings, lump cakes, and fried spring rolls are available in spring. In summer, you can enjoy such delicacies as white and tender cheese, cool and green rice and lotus leaf gruel, bean jelly, and sweet-sour plum juice. In autumn, the lanes and streets in the area are permeated with the smell of roasted meat. There are also fresh corn, soup made of chopped sheep and beef offal, quick-fried tripe, haw jelly... When winter comes, you can smell roasted sweet potatoes on the streets. You can also have hot delicacies such as sweetened flour gruel fried in beef fat, red bean and barley gruel, fried bean curd, and instant-boiled mutton to warm yourself up. Some snacks are available all year round in every corner of Beijing.

Sticky Rice with Sweet Fillings (Ai Wo Wo): As white as snow, this delicacy is made of sticky rice which is first steamed, pounded into pulp, shaped into a ball and then filled with sesame, white sugar, pea-flour, jujube paste and some other fillings. It tastes so smooth that it became a favourite snack of noble families during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is said that Ai Wo Wo became the homophone of "Yu ai wo wo (emperor's special)" because the emperor loved it very much.

Sticky Rice Cake Slices with Bean Paste (Qiegao): This is available all year round, particularly in March. Came into being during the 13th Century, this snack has a long history, and its production and sale remain unchanged even today. The most common qiegao is made of glutinous rice, date or bean paste, and is sold by the slice. The glutinous rice flour is first well mixed with water and then steamed.

The cooked flour is then kneaded evenly into thin pieces. Each cake has four layers



Cheese

with bean paste or date paste spread between them. It is cut into slices sprinkled with white sugar and served on a plate.

Cheese: Cheese making in Beijing has a long history. One of the popular summer snacks, it is a semi-curdled food made of cow or sheep milk. Its connoisseurs speak highly of it because it can serve as a nutritious food or drink.

Dried Fruit (Guozi Gan): The Dictionary of Beijing Dialect specifically explains the recipe: use dried persimmon as the main ingredient, add dried apricot, and then soak them in warm boiled water. Finally add in slices of fresh lotus root and well mix them into a rich juice. It is a delightful summer snack.

The dried persimmon is amber, the dried apricot is orange-red, and the lotus root is white. They are cast with sweetened osmanthus flower juice. Served on a bed of ice, it tastes cool, crisp and a little bit sour and sweet, very refreshing.



Sticky Rice
(Ai Wo Wo)



Sticky Rice Cake
Slices (Qiegao)



Dried Fruit
(Guozi Gan)

Sheep Offal Soup (Baitang Zasui): It has a unique taste and is a favorite of most native Beijingers. The main ingredients are the internal organs of sheep: tripe, heart, lung and intestines. They are shredded and well-cooked in mutton soup, seasoned with salt, Chinese pepper, green onion, ginger and garlic. It is ready to serve when the soup turns milky white after the scum is skimmed off. It is served with coriander, sesame paste and pungent sauce flavourings.

Green Bean Noodle (Ludou Zamian): The noodle is made of mung bean, for Beijing people think that it has a quality of coolness, so Green Bean Noodle is considered a kind of summer food. During the early afternoons of June and July in the past, vendors would carry the noodles in long woven baskets and peddle all the way along the streets and lanes.

The noodle is often mixed with fried mutton, Chinese preserved cabbage (suancai), soup of mung flour, oil with fried capsicum, and a little cut caraway. This local gourmet is believed to alleviate heat in the body.



Braised Mutton (Shaoyangrou)

Chao Ma Tofu: This food is made of another Beijing delicacy, mung bean milk (douzhi). It is grey, white, red and green, alternating colours. It tastes sour and hot, and is



Chao Ma Tofu



Stewed Mutton Strips (Payangroutiao)

fragrant and fluffy. The most original is stir-fried with mutton fat. It can also be stir-fried with rapeseed oil. What is most important with stir-frying is to extract water from the starch residues and make them sticky.

Sweet Bean Baked Cake (Douxian Shaobing): A common Beijing snack, it tastes crisp, soft and sweet.

Baked Cake (Shaobing): Baked Cake can be either salty or sweet. The recipe calls for half a kilogram of oil and a full kilogram of flour, they are mixed with a small amount of salt or white sugar to produce an oily dough. The dough is then spread out and divided into small sections.

These are kneaded into the shape of small peaches, and pressed flat after sesame is added, either square or round, and then put into an oven to bake.

Braised Mutton (Shaoyangrou): When the Braised Mutton is ready at a mutton shop, its sweet smell can travel a long way. Well done outside, but tender inside, it is crispy and not at all greasy. It goes well with wine and Baked Cake. It is a traditional Muslim food. Water-cooled noodles seasoned with its soup have a distinctive taste.

Stewed Mutton Strips (Payangroutiao): This is a famous Muslim dish using streaky mutton as the main ingredient. The mutton is first rinsed in cold water before being cooked in boiling water. Then it is cut into strips and steamed with seasonings including green onion, ginger, Shaoxing rice wine and soy sauce. After it's well done, it is then braised in a pan. The dish, golden in color, is soft and fragrant.

Translated by Chen Qiping



Sweet Bean Baked Cake (Douxian Shaobing)



Long-standing Businesses of Niujie

The present Niujie area is undergoing its largest demolition and reconstruction in history. Some snacks will disappear after the Festival of Fast-breaking. Fortunately there are some long-standing businesses, which offer quality delicacies all year round.



Quick-Fried Tripe at "Baodu Feng"

Baodu (quick-fried tripe) would seem to be just a snack for common people. But Baodu Feng used to be a special supplier of oxen and sheep tripe to the imperial kitchen.

Today, the descendant of Baodu Feng, Mr. Feng Guangqu, still displays the culinary art handed down from his ancestors. Feng began to learn cookery from his father at the age of 10. The dishes comprise quick-fried beef tripe and quick-fried sheep tripe and can be cooked with either oil, salt or water. Baodu Feng uses the third way. The fresh oxen or sheep stomach is washed clean, cut into different patterns according to the different positions, and then boiled for a while before being scooped out of the water. Crisp and tasty, it is served dipped in seasonings. The seasoning of Baodu Feng is also extremely good, composed of 13 ingredients including coriander, sesame paste, vinegar, fermented bean curd and mushroom juice. Two types of seasoning processed under high temperatures are kept secret.

★ Address : 39 Langfang Ertiao, Qianmeng Wai



Assorted Quick-fried Tripe (Duren Sanpin)



Braised Mutton at "Yuesheng Zhai"

Mr. Ma's ancestor founded the Yuesheng Zhai during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). It produced braised mutton seasoned with soy sauce and stewed mutton at the very beginning. Later they improved the seasoning preparation with advice from an imperial doctor, using clove and fructus amomis as the major ingredients, and fermented soya paste and salt as the dressing. The mutton cooked this way not only tastes good, but also is nutritious. Deep-fried in oil, the braised mutton becomes another delicacy, which is crisp outside and tender inside if eaten hot. It can also be

eaten with noodles in soup, which is a traditional summer delicacy in Beijing. The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) also liked the mutton produced here and issued Yuesheng Zhai four passes (worn in the waist which showed that one was permitted to enter the imperial court) for the

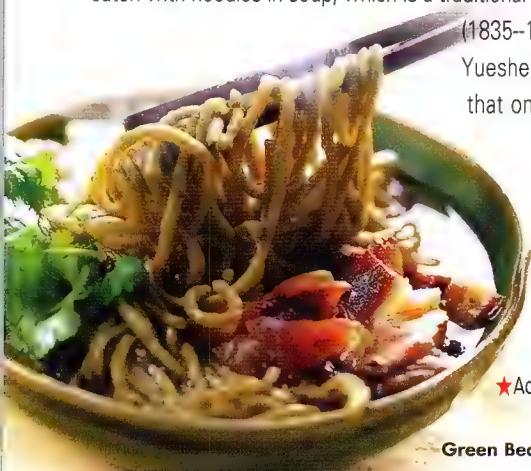
convenience of delivering the food. These passes are now held by the National Archives.

During the years of Chinese resistance against Japanese aggression, when it was difficult to buy mutton, the Yuesheng Zhai increased the production of braised beef, which has since enjoyed equal fame with the braised mutton. In addition to these two specialties, stir-fried starch residues, noodles made from mung bean flour, fruit roll and other snacks are also available in this small shop.

★ Address : Langfang Ertiao, Qianmen Wai.



Braised Beef (Jiang Niurou)



Green Bean Noodle (Ludou Zhamian)



Cheese Product at "Nailao Wei"

Different from cheese produced abroad, the cheese produced by Nailao (cheese) Wei is closer to yogurt, looking white and delicate. It tastes sweet and smooth. Laogan is also made from fresh milk. The brown, soft cheese has no strong smell, nor does it taste greasy. There is also naijuan. The crunchy milk skin roll stuffed with haw jam or sesame paste is

Cheese

sweet and fragrant.

According to Mr. Wei, the owner of the shop, his ancestor obtained the method of making cheese from a friend who served with the imperial court of the Qing Dynasty. The following two generations had lived on and improved this culinary skill. In addition to its dairy products, this shop also sells 20 other snacks, including sweetened fried flour gruel, sweet-sour plum juice, dried fruits, fried haw and rosy dates, enough to remind elderly Beijingers of their childhood.

★ Address : Guoqiaoju Snack Street, 1st floor underground, Xin Dong'an Market, Wangfujin



Mr. Wei

Islamic Cuisine

Islamic cuisine was introduced to China together with Islam in 651, and became a branch of Chinese cuisine culture. Muslims have to follow Islamic creeds both in food and religious activities. These creeds mainly come from the Alcoran and The Memorandum of Mohammed, which are the core of Islamic culture. Some special parts of the creeds have many rules related to food, specifying what is permitted and what is not. According to The Memorandum of Mohammed, hygiene is a part of the faith. The Alcoran tells followers to eat good food. Islamic jurists follow the principle of "good food" to decide what is edible. For example, beef, mutton, chicken, duck, goose and some aquatic products are all good food, while pork is filthy. In addition, animals which die naturally are not edible because the cause of death may be unknown and their flesh could be potentially poisonous; as for the flesh of eagles, wolves, tigers and the like are also bad because of their evil natures; furthermore, the flesh of dogs, snakes and cats and the blood of animal are also inedible. Freshness is characteristic of Islamic food. For instance, fish in seawater are edible, but the dead one floating on the surface are not, for they may cause harm as they may be decayed.

Baked Cake at "Deshun Zhai"

The ancestor of Deshun Zhai began to make Baked Cakes (Shaobing) and crisply fried rings of dough (Jiaoquan) sometime from 1856 to 1874. The pancakes and the dough rings produced by the Juwang Family were very famous in Beijing. Although they were the



Crispy Fried Ring (Jiaoquan)



Mr. Wang and his daughter

dough ring looks to be very simple, but it's not easy to make. Special attention has to be paid to making the dough, the selection of ingredients and cooking. Eating the crispy fried ring of dough with mung bean milk is the favourite treat of many older Beijingers.

most ordinary popular snacks, they were well received by people from all walks of life. The pancake here is baked golden brown. It cracks with just a light touch on its skin, which is sprinkled with sesame seeds. You'll be greeted by its fragrant at the first bite. Looking at it carefully, you'll find inside the cake has a dozen separate layers. The



Baked Cake (Shaobing)

New Year's Cake at "Niangao Qian"

When the capital of Ming Dynasty was moved from Nanjing to Beijing, rice followed northwards. Accordingly, sticky and fragrant Niangao (New Year's cake) made of glutinous rice flour and other sticky snacks began to appear in Beijing.

Sticky snacks are the most common of the Muslim snacks. When Niangao Qian started his business in the later years of



the Qing Dynasty, about four in every 10 Niuje residents engaged in selling New Year cake. At that time they had to hawk their cakes along the streets or set a stall on a street. Their lives were very difficult. Today, Niangao Qian is a very famous food chain in the Niuje area. In addition to the popular sticky rice cake (Ai Wo Wo and Qiegao), the shop also offers a dozen other snacks, including Rolling Donkey (Ludagun, made of bean-flour), Chinese Yam Roll (Shanyaojuan, made from kidney bean flour), cake made of chestnut flour (Susigao) and deep-fried cake made from glutinous millet flour (Zhagao).

★ Address: Niuje Muslim Supermarket



Rolling Donkey
(Ludagun)



Yellow Bean Cake (Wan Douhuang)

Sheep Head at "Yangtou Ma"

Yangtou (Sheep head) Ma made its mark in Beijing during the early to mid-1800s.

The carefully selected sheep's head is cleaned thoroughly and boiled in water without any seasoning. Diners can, according to their preference, sprinkle on it a kind of special salt made from fried salt, cloves and Chinese prickly ash. The container of such seasoning is made from ox horn, which is humidity-proof.

Ma Guoyi, the sixth generation of Yangtou Ma, has given full play to the craftsmanship handed down from his ancestors. Not only can he cook as well as his ancestors, but he has also developed outstanding skills of using a knife to cut thin mutton slices. With a 60-cm-long knife, he seems to have eyes in his hand and quickly cuts the mutton into paper-thin slices according to the requirements of customers.



Other specialties, including noodles with quick-fried beef sauce (Baoniurou Jiaomian) and spicy sheep hooves (Wuxiang Jiangyangti) are also available in this shop.

★ Address: 98 Nanheng Xijie



Thin Slices of Mutton

The Best of Niuje

1. Tulufan Restaurant: This place is reasonably priced and known for its Xinjiang flavour. Special dishes include: roasted lamb, special ramen noodle (Latiaozi), wrapped mutton or beef (Baorou) and kebabs (Yangrouchuan).
2. The Niuje Street Islamic Supermarket: Coin-like cakes (Niangaoqian, a special snack for celebrating Chinese New Year Festival).
3. The Niuje Street Islamic Beef Supermarket: The name said it all.
4. Niangao Li: Various sticky rice snacks (ie. Niangao)
5. The Shukelan Restaurant: Cooked bones and soups made with chopped entrails of sheep and beef.
6. Old Baoduman: An old shop where people stand in line to buy beef and mutton. The cakes filled with meat are most delicious.
7. The Hong Family Snack Bar: A range of surprising snacks.
8. Niuje Islamic Snack Bazaar: The authentic snack kingdom.
9. Yangtou Ma: A famous old restaurant, where it is famous for its mutton, noodles with fried beef and curled fruit-like cakes.
10. Tiankelai: An Islamic restaurant that is recognized for its fried steamed bread of corn and decayed tofu (Choutoufu).
11. Yunxia Restaurant: A small shop, serving hot steamed buns stuffed with beef and onions, and braised beef.
12. Hongcai Fresh Noodles: Aside from fresh noodles, there are other kinds of snacks are also available.
13. Jubaoyuan Shambles of Beef and Mutton: A must-try old shop.



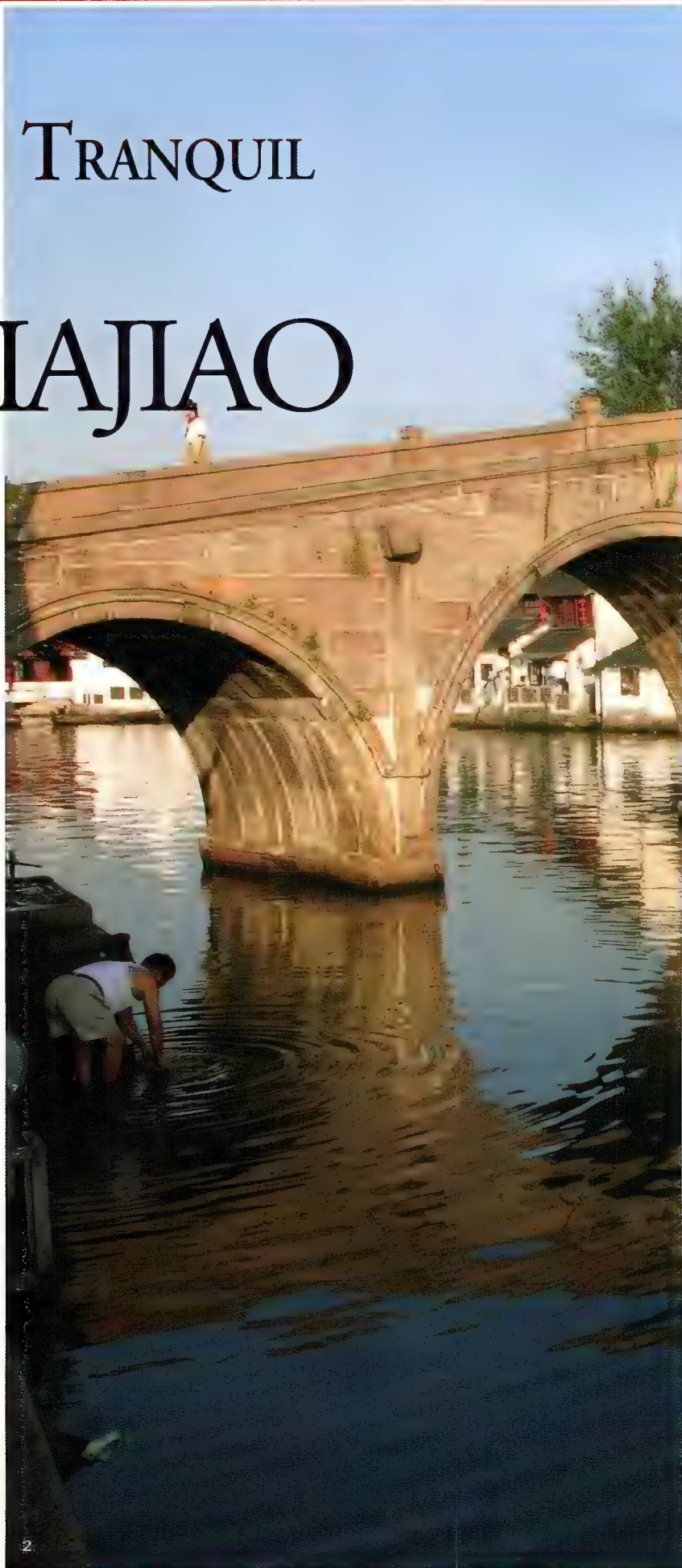
SHANGHAI'S TRANQUIL WATER VILLAGE: ZHUJIAJIAO

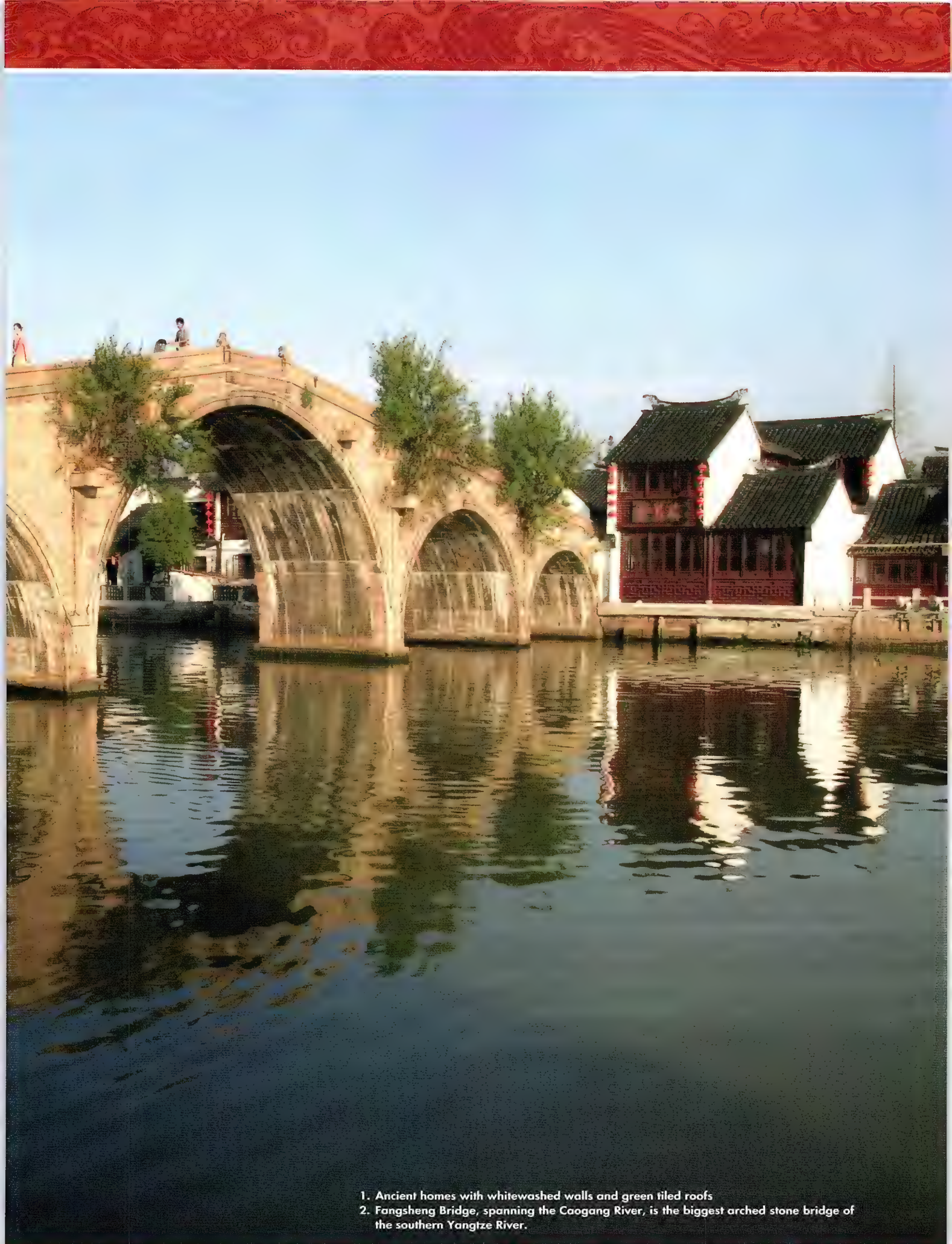
Photos and Article by Joseph Ma

The great metropolis of Shanghai has built its reputation as a fast-moving city of skyscrapers and commerce, traffic jams and urban hustle. However, nestled in its western suburbs is a sleepy water village, Zhujiajiao, which has remained undisturbed over the centuries and survived as a haven of tranquility.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties (14th to the 20th Centuries), Zhujiajiao, due to its location alongside the Grand Canal on which rice was shipped to the emperors, became a gathering place of merchants and had a flourishing rice trade. This laid the foundation for the prosperity of modern Shanghai.

With the passage of time, Zhujiajiao has become a calm backwater — its hey day of prosperity long gone, but fortunately, its classic features remain. Families live by the canals are spanned by bridges, with small boats crisscrossing the waterways. It is a safe harbour from the stormy rat race of city life.





1. Ancient homes with whitewashed walls and green tiled roofs
2. Fangsheng Bridge, spanning the Caogang River, is the biggest arched stone bridge of the southern Yangtze River.



Visitors to Shanghai are often rush to see Pudong, the face of the modern city, but they should go to Zhujiajiao to see what Shanghai used to be.

Zhujiajiao is in Qingpu, the western suburbs, south of the Yangtze River. Although it remains relatively unknown and slightly off the beaten track, this works in its favour. Compare with other water villages that have turned themselves into popular tourist attractions, Zhujiajiao has kept its integrity.

I visited an ancient water town in the 80s, Zhouzhuang (near Suzhou City), before it came to fame as a travel hot spot. The place and people were simple and unpretentious back then — the hotel I stayed in town did not even have a public toilet, and the inhabitants were using simple wooden commodes! Running water was unknown in the town; any form of washing meant a trip to the well. It is difficult to imagine such things today. Yet I remember well walking along the green slab-stone road in the bright moonlight,

with the occasional shouts of children ringing out. Nonetheless, after several reconstructions by ambitious entrepreneurs, the town has never been the same again. I dreaded seeing my old memories shattered when I visited the town again by chance.

Zhujiajiao, on the other hand, seems to be more fortunate, for it has still retained most of its characters and the damage done by tourism was minimal.

A Village Built on Rice and Textiles

On my way to Zhujiajiao from Shanghai's Pudong Airport, I found a broad, smooth highway, which took

me to the outskirts of the village in little over an hour. As I walked into the village, the scene suddenly changed and I was transported back several hundred years.

Zhujiajiao people proudly tell how their ancestors established a country market here 1,700 years ago. Over three centuries ago it was still famous for its textile industry. A popular saying has it that Zhujiajiao can

manufacture enough cloth for the entire world. Later it became even more prosperous as the rice industry flourished. It powered other businesses and more than a thousand stores once lined its almost two-kilometre-long main street. It became a major town south of the Yangtze River. Even about 100 years ago, Zhujiajiao continued to prosper: Endless stream of merchants, restaurants and food stores that opened the entire night, and traffic-packed harbour.

Zhujiajiao's main tourist spots are concentrated along both banks of the



Caogang River and on the once prosperous Bei Da Jie (great northern road). Zhujiajiao has many small rivers, and stone bridges link all its streets and alleyways. This ancient town still has over a thousand Ming and Qing Dynasty buildings.

1. Villagers look relaxed by the river.
2. The great feature of the street is its narrowness at just two-metre wide, so the crowds jostle along.
3. The famous food of Zhujiajiao is the spicy and crispy pork hoof, weighing 500g each.
4. Diners love to gather at the restaurants in the evening.





Resisted the temptation of being the next "model unit" of commercialism, the inhabitants who have lived here for generations will not compromise their lifestyle and customs, which makes Zhujiajiao even more appealing.

Fangsheng Bridge is the biggest arched stone bridge south of Yangtze River. "Fangsheng" means to free captive birds and fish in line with Buddhist teachings. This bridge, which a monk spent 15 years begging for alms contributed to its making, is the centre of the town. Bearing witness to the prosperity of the town, it is more than 400 years old. It has five arches with a length of 72 m, the largest of its kind. As it is named Fangsheng, many merchants sell goldfish on the bridge for tourists to free into the river to win Buddha's blessing.

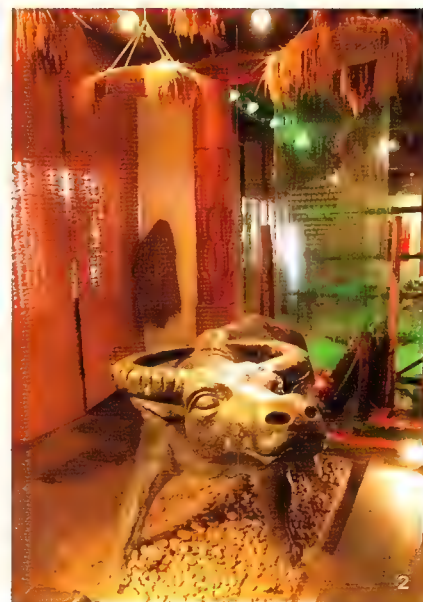
The busy Bei Da Jie is at the southern end of the bridge. Along the main street are

ancient buildings that have been completely preserved. There are many shops selling souvenirs, soya bean sauce and medicine, along with wine and teashops. Many tourists can easily spend well over half a day here. The interesting features of the street are its narrowness at just two-metre wide, and the crowds that jostle along. It is impossible to see more than a few metres ahead on the street, which crisscrosses the river, giving the pedestrian a floating feeling.

The number of bridges in town is an indicator of its economic success; it is not surprising to see a highly developed town like Zhujiajiao has a total of 36 bridges!

The nearby rice trade hall illustrates how Zhujiajiao has become a leading rice market. It is not an exhibition hall, but a rice market with memories of antiquity. It has been restored as the Hefeng Rice Store (a famous old brand name). The rice hall shows spring ploughing,

summer weeding, autumn harvesting and winter storage. It also shows production equipment, such as a waterwheel, the kind powered by the wind and drawn by oxen.



Traditional Shops Around Town

Despite massive invasion of giant supermarkets in Shanghai, family-oriented traditional shops, especially herbal stores and ethnic food stores, have always remained the essential shops in Zhujiajiao for centuries.

Dong Tianhe, with a history of 100 years, is well known for its medicines. The building has a stone slab above the doorway in the Shanghai architectural style. Dong Tianhe was reopened about a decade ago, and it even has doctors of traditional Chinese medicine serving customers. Another antique store is Han Dalong, it greets its customers with the smell of soya bean sauce, and it features many historic artifacts from this trade.

Nothing reflects the shrewdness of the town people better than the big abacus that hangs below the eaves of the main hall in the City God Temple. The number displayed on the abacus is 666123456789888 ("6" and "8" are the lucky numbers in Chinese). This well calculating deity who bestow devotees with wealth seems to be quite popular in town!

Of course, not everyone in Zhujiajiao is as money-oriented; the famous official of the Justice Department during the mid 1700s, Wang Chang, was one. Unwilling to

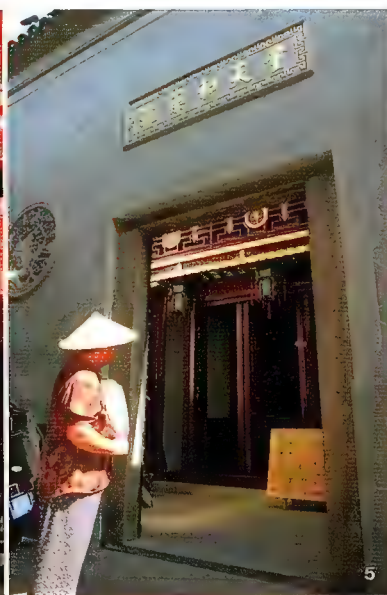


take bribes as other officials did, he retired back to his hometown, where he wrote many great poems and prose. His textual research on ancient bronze and stone tablet inscriptions became so famous that the town dedicated a Memorial Hall to commemorate him.

Near the Wang Chang Memorial Hall is the Qing Dynasty Post Office, built in the 17th Century. Since Zhujiajiao was an important transport hub, it was natural to set up a post office here. The hall explains the development of the modern post office

and the way it operates, as well as the difficulties of delivering the mail before the days of the internet, fax, telegram and

1. The Ma Family Garden is also known as Ke Zhiyuan.
2. The Hall of Rice Planting and Rice Trade shows farming techniques in south China.
3. This Covered Bridge is the only wooden bridge in Zhujiajiao.
4. On the City God Temple hangs a big abacus. The city deity watches over the inhabitants.
5. Dong Tianhe Medicine Store is straight out of history.
6. Han Dalong Soya bean Sauce Shop has a history of 100 years.





telephone. It also has a wharf from where mail boats set off on their deliveries.

To really immerse yourself in this water village life, it is imperative to visit the teashops, which abound in Zhujiajiao. They range from luxurious to basic and are priced accordingly. Before six in the morning, I visited the "Number One Teashop of Southern Yangtze", and it was packed with people and alive with noise. The locals are used to claim their cups of tea at the crack of dawn.

It's All about Tea

The "Number One Teashop of Southern Yangtze" has a spacious hall on the ground floor. On the balcony of the second floor, you can watch the



Caogang River flow past. On the opposite bank, a row of ancient homes can be seen with their whitewashed walls and dark green tile roofs.

Drinking tea here is a satisfying experience, because the shop offers snacks and refreshments peculiar to the south of the Yangtze River: spicy dried bean curd, fresh water chestnuts and sweet lotus stuffed with glutinous rice and zongzi (pyramid-shaped dumpling made of



glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves). A meal usually costs around 30 to 40 yuan. Locals, however, do not eat at the teashop, they rather enjoy a good pot of tea for just one or two yuan.

On the opposite bank is the "Ah Po Teashop" facing the Buddhist Meditation Quarters and the wharf. This teashop received distinguished foreign guests and state leaders before, such as the wife of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Jiang Zemin, chairman of the Central Military Commission. The hall on the second floor is air-conditioned, and the chair in which Jiang Zemin once sat is on display on the right as a tourist attraction, but I personally prefer the balcony overlooking the river. I will have lasting memories of sipping fragrant tea and the serene environment.

1. Sipping tea and watching the boats go by from the balcony of Ah Po Teashop.
2. The one and only Qing Dynasty Post Office in Shanghai.
3. The Qing Dynasty Post Office wharf from where the mail was delivered.
4. The "No. 1 Teashop of Southern Yangtze"
5. Tourists entering Zhujiajiao must buy tickets, while residents come and go freely.
6. A small wooden commode makes a good souvenir.

Travel tips

• Getting there:

About one hour's drive from Shanghai, Zhujiajiao is easy to get to: Under the No. 5 escalator in the Xuhui District Stadium, 40 coach firms are ready to take you there. The bus that goes to Zhujiajiao leaves every half an hour from 7am to 4:30pm. You can take public buses 15, 42, 43, 89, 92, 104, 111 or the Bright Pearl subway line to Zhujiajiao. For further information: (21) 6426 5555 and 6426 6455.



• Accommodation:

The best times to see the water village are the evening and morning. An overnight stay is recommended.

Ke Zhiyuan Hotel Ke Zhiyuan is a large Ming-Qing Dynasty building. At its front is a small canal. Prices: 200 yuan (~US \$25) for a standard double room, 260 yuan (~US \$30) for a three-person suite. Address: Xi Jing Jie, not far from the northern exit in Zhujiajiao. Telephone: (21) 5924 1879

The **Shanghai Jia Hua Training Centre** is the largest garden-style hotel. The place is enormous with many luxury villas and standard hotel rooms, complete with different amusements and games. Standard hotel rooms are priced from 328 yuan (~US \$40).

Address: 1 Nan Huan Road, about ten minutes walk from the northern exit of Zhujiajiao. Telephone: (21) 5924 8100

• Admission fees:

Tickets to Zhujiajiao attractions are of two kinds: single ticket and through ticket. You must pay 10 yuan (~US \$1) to enter Zhujiajiao. You can see all the sights, but this does not include entry to buildings such as Ke Zhi Yuan, the Qing Dynasty Post Office and the City God Temple. You can buy individual ticket to see them, or you can also buy a through ticket for 50 yuan (~US \$5). This will allow you to see the 12 scenic spots in Zhujiajiao.

Boating: The wharves are outside Han Dalong Soya bean Sauce Store and beside Ke Zhi Yuan. You can charter a boat for half an hour at 50 yuan (seating six).

Teashops: The "No. 1 Teashop of Southern Yangtze River" sells cheap tea on the street. "Ah Po Teashop" caters to tourists and is beautifully decorated. A cup of tea is 10 to 20 yuan. Upstairs the same costs 34 to 40 yuan, but you are paying for the view.

• Shopping:

Zhujiajiao's distinctive snacks can be bought on Bei Da Jie as gifts. A bag spicy pork hoof weighs roughly 2 lbs. It is vacuum-packed and easy to carry. A small wooden commode makes an interesting souvenir.



Map of Zhujiajiao



One of China's great natural scenic attractions lies in the remote east of Inner Mongolia, on a mountain range where divine animals rest near the pillars of heaven.

These creatures have watched over the landscape for millions of years from the top of Beida Mountain, Hexigten Qi of Chifeng City. Geologists believe that Ashatu (meaning "precipitous rocks") Ice Stone

The Mountain of Divine Animals

Photos and Article by Wang Juncai

Forest were formed in the glacial epoch of the Quaternary Period.

Beida Mountain extends about four kilometers from east to west. The highest peak is 1,869 m above sea level. Six mountains are linked with Beida Mountain, radiating to the grasslands in the north. In summer, herdsman pitch their gers on the grassland at the end of the six mountains, where their horses, cattle and sheep graze.

On the ridge of the first mountain is a large "divine bird," raising its head and facing southwest. Near the bird, tourists can find other stone figures, which are all vivid and lifelike.

On the second mountain stands a huge

"camel", known as the "Camel Neck" by local people. Legend has it that a camel meditated itself for thousands of years. When it was about to go to heaven, the treasure around its neck that would help it become an immortal was stolen. The camel could do nothing, but stood here, with its eyes wide-opened. Another legend says it was a "divine camel" descending to earth. About 80 m behind the "camel" are houses for the present camel herdsman.

In the middle of the third mountain is "Pagoda Peak", which appears like the hat of a Persian merchant.

The fourth mountain is known for the "Northern Heavenly Pillar", which is as tall as a 10-story building. It is said that Genghis



Khan once tied his horse to it. Near the stone pillar is the "Stone Forest Wall", made of oddly shaped rocks.

The stone forest on the fifth mountain is the most magnificent, with the largest number of stone pillars. On the "Broken Stone Wall" is an ice mortar, in addition to "Southern Heavenly Pillar", "City Wall Forest" and "Hole Crag" at the western end.

At the juncture of the main mountain and the fifth mountain is a huge "Ancient City". On the south of the mountain, there is a rock that looks like Donald duck. Half way up the mountain in the west stands "A Squad of Bodyguards", looking powerful and majestic.

Only a few tourists go to the sixth mountain, which is shorter than the main peak, and does not have a road. At the western end of the mountain are nine "Book Mountains," of which four are close together.

Thanks to natural erosion over the last hundreds of millions of years, ancient glaciers became the magnificent Ashatu Ice Stone Forest with stones in all kinds of shapes and postures.

Translated by Kuang Peihua

1. The "camel" stands on the second mountain.
2. The magnificent "City Wall Forest" on the fifth mountain
3. The sixth mountain
4. The Ice Stone Forest was formed in the glacial epoch of the Quaternary Period.
5. The "Half Stone Wall" on the fifth mountain.



Travel Tips

Getting There: There are two routes, one in the south and the other in the north. As the two routes join on Beida Mountain, visitors can go up the mountain along the southern route, and come down the northern route, or vice versa.

Southern Route: You can go north from Linxi County seat along the asphalt road for 80 km to Banshifangzi, and continue 28 km west along the gravel road before reaching Nianzigou Village, to the south of Beida Mountain. You can climb the mountain here. This route is the shortest.

Northern Route: You can go from Xilinhot. At the junction of three roads at Khandakhan, go northward, continue to travel 26 km along the newly built asphalt road to Baiyin Aobao, where you can go northward along a gravel road for 110 km, via Bayan Qagan Somu, and Bayan Gaole Somu. Then you can climb the mountain from the northern slope. Though this route is long, you can see the beautiful grassland and enjoy Mongolian customs. It is advisable to stay the night at Baiyin Aobao to visit the only spruce forest on sandy land in the country, and stay a day at Bayan Qagan Somu to appreciate the vast grassland and local customs. You can also visit the "Sea of Forests" at Huanggangliang.

Hiring a Car: You can go to Chifeng by train and then get on a bus or rent a vehicle at Chifeng, Linxi County. If you want to take a natural hot bath, you can stay at Rishuitang Town, and then hire a car to go to the Ice Stone Forest. Before leaving, be sure to fill the gas tank.

The Best Season: The best time for tourists to go to the Ice Stone Forest is between June and August. In winter it is very cold and often snow.

Points for Attention: In the Ice Stone Forest, the temperature varies greatly between day and night, and it often rains. Prepare winter outerwear, wet weather and enough food and water. Picnicking on a stone table or a stone altar is a great experience.



Deluge in the Dry Heart of Asia

Photos & Article by Li Xueliang



As a general rule, the more remote and unknown a region is, the greater its mystique and the more mysterious its landscape. The Altun Mountain Nature Reserve, in southeastern Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is just such a place. Surrounded by the Altun, Qimantage and Kunlun Mountain, it is known among foreign explorers as “the Arid Center of Asia”. For the first-time visitor, it is indeed a wild land.

From Ruqiang County, it is just over 300 km to the reserve, but in this wilderness, road maintenance is almost unheard of. We bumped along a makeshift dirt road for 14 hours before arriving at our first stop — Mangnai Town.

Four-Wheeled Ships of the Desert

The road then led from Mangnai to Qimantage Township. Once in the mountain area, it became increasingly difficult to drive on — particularly in the middle of the rainy season. Floodwaters carrying mud and sand had washed away the road surface. About


six hours later, we arrived at the inspection station of the natural reserve.

After a short rest, we resumed our journey. We came to the top of a hill and scanned the azure waters of Duck Lake, which lies 5,400 m above sea level. Dark, brown hills flanked the lake on which floated flocks of yellow ducks. However, not a single tree can be seen on the shore. Marveling over the scene, I was surprised to find that there was no road ahead. I could only drive along the edges of the lake. Fortunately the ground beneath the water's edge was firm enough for the cars. We

rolled forward like we were driving on water.

The Town of Sheep

In the darkness, we wove through the wilderness, making good use of the headlights. Near dawn, we came to the seat of Qimantage Township Government. This town is just a handful of livestock breeders, but hundreds of sheep live among the brick houses. The township government has just five workers. We borrowed a generator and had a delicious meal of mutton in the lamplight. Then we tumbled into bed.

- 
1. The Tibetan wild ass
 2. Overlook the Duck Lake from 5,400 m above sea level
 3. The Shahe river is shut-in.
 4. The magnificent spectacle of Karst landform

The next morning Tulsun, a Uygur administrative worker from the natural reserve, came to act as our guide. A walking map of the Altun Mountain, Tulsun led the way when we set off again.

Left Looking Like Asses

When our car was jolting along a rugged road, I suddenly saw a host of Tibetan wild asses. At the sight of our car, they rushed towards us in excitement, a herd of galloping brown beasts making a magnificent sight against the green and yellow pasture. They overtook our car in a flash before pulling up on the high ground ahead, where they glanced back at us and snorted their contempt.



Large sand dunes appeared when we approached the middle of the basin. Stretching to the horizon, some were crescent-shaped, and some looked like pyramids. We found a lake as bright as a mirror in the sea of sand. A clear spring oozing from the foot of a large sand dune created a magnificent spectacle of sand linking with lake and swamps alternating with sand. It took us two hours to detour

around the marsh before we got to a lodging. We managed to get some fuel and made a bonfire at a waste station of the natural reserve. Soon I felt as warm as toast.

Yak Attack

The next morning dawned clear and bright. We started off early, heading for the Dajiuba Grassland. Ahead of us hares, foxes and other small animals bounced away from our car. Flowers in full bloom swayed in the wind, and birds sang in the thick grass. We





1

were feeling on top of the world, but Tulsun brought us back down to earth with the warning that the marshland in this area was unstable: hard on one place and soft in others. We had to be cautious or we would sink. Sure enough, before long we did meet with trouble. It took a lot of work and bustling about before we managed to extract ourselves from ditches.

In the setting sun, the pasture was enveloped by a golden sheet of gauze, quiet and secluded. A trace of mystery was wafting through the pure air. I wasted no time to capture this moment with my camera. That night we camped in tents. In my dreams, I smelled grass and flowers.

The next day, we moved about like lonely souls loitering on the grassland. Tulsun gave

us another warning; this was the season when yaks could be at their most dangerous, not as a herd, but alone. An individual yak is the most dangerous because it is usually a fierce and agitated bull expelled from the host. It was foolish to provoke one. At first I took little notice of his warning. After turning a corner, our car was approaching an earthen slope when suddenly a giant beast popped up in front of us. "A yak! A yak!" cried Tulsun in amazement. The yak stared at us with a murderous look. I turned round and fled. However, it chased us. I pressed the accelerator hard, fearing a ditch could be lying ahead. Fortunately, the animal gave up the chase after five or six minutes. We heaved a long, collective sigh, having made a narrow escape unharmed.



Downpour in the Desert


It rained hard the day we planned our return trip. It was getting dark, but there was no sign that the rain would stop. If the rain had kept up, we could have found ourselves trapped in the mountains the next day. In view of this, we decided to return in spite of the downpour. I was uncertain about driving in a strange place at night, so Tulsun took the



3



wheel. Thanks to his experience, we made it safely back to the inspection station.

The Altun Mountain has very peculiar landforms. Lava pillars and castles of sand have been built by wind erosion. The 6,973-m-high Muztag Peak leads to a world of ice and snow. The sands, lakes, glaciers together with the unusual plants and wild animals form a harmonious world. I wished I could take endless photos. It was a pity that we did not have enough fuel to keep exploring. 

Translated by Anju K.

1. There are numerous rivers in the Altun Mountain Nature Reserve.
2. The wild flowers
3. Discarded Animal Protection Station
4. Please save the Tibetan antelope!



Tips for Travellers

▼ Background :

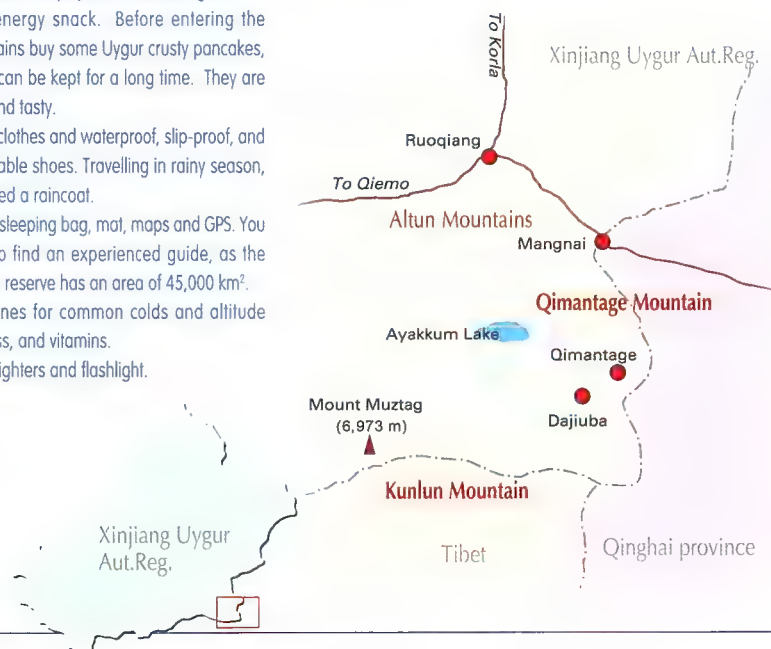
The largest of its kind in China, the Altun Mountain Natural Reserve is under the administration of Bayin Guoleng Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture. The reserve lies on the south of the Altun and the north of the eastern Kunlun Mountain. It stretches from the border of Ruqiang and Qiemo Counties in the west to the juncture of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province in the east. In the north it reaches Qimantage that borders the southern part of the Altun Mountain. In the south it adjoins the eastern Kunlun Mountains at the boundary of Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang. The natural reserve covers 360 km from west to east and 190 km from north to south. Its total area is 44,940 km².

Surrounded by high mountains, the natural reserve has eight rivers flowing through it, the longest being the Sulubeitilek at 280 km. The largest lake in the reserve, Ayakkum Lake at 536 km² in area, lies in the north. The reserve is home to rare animals and exotic birds such as Tibetan wild asses, Tibetan antelopes, wild yaks, wild camels, black-necked cranes, Tibetan snow cocks, imperial eagles and Pallas sea eagles.

▼ Preparations:

Before setting off to the Altun Mountain, you should have:

1. Personal documents for passing through examination stations. Sometimes, letters of introduction are very useful. You can ask Bayin Guoleng Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture about the procedure and data for the entry of the natural reserve.
Telephone number of the travel bureau of the prefecture: (996) 201 0603, Fax: (996) 202 6030.
2. More than two jeeps with sufficient gas.
3. High-energy snack. Before entering the mountains buy some Uygur crusty pancakes, which can be kept for a long time. They are crisp and tasty.
4. Warm clothes and waterproof, slip-proof, and breathable shoes. Travelling in rainy season, you need a raincoat.
5. A tent, sleeping bag, mat, maps and GPS. You have to find an experienced guide, as the natural reserve has an area of 45,000 km².
6. Medicines for common colds and altitude sickness, and vitamins.
7. Knife, lighters and flashlight.





Counting the Cost of **A Big Heart**

Photos & Article by Elma

Shui Hetian seems to have what every artist could ever ask for: talent, drive and fame, except for one thing, funding. In a commercialized city like Hong Kong, living as an artist needs to make many compromises unless one has a deep pocket. Still, Shui has kept his burning passion to pursue and share beauty through his creations for many decades.

For the last several years, he went to Vancouver where he opened a painting gallery, has been touring Southeast Asia, Europe and North America to run photo exhibitions, has gone to Mainland China to shoot documentary films on tourism, has been busy helping poverty relief there ...

He doubled as a salesman and lived frugally in order to support his artwork. Despite all the activity, what he finds most exhausting is the search for sponsorship and benefactor.

Shui Hetian is not just a photographer, but also a creative artist transcending media boundaries, who has been involved in photography, video, painting, publishing and distribution. He has many ideas and is highly creative. Once he has an idea, he must find partners to turn his idea into reality. Recently he persuaded a bus company to run his documentaries on tourism on the bus TV channel. He achieved this by convincing the public relation company of the TV channel. To ask for cooperation, he has to sell his ideas first.

Shui has faced plenty of rejections in his search for sponsorship. Perhaps he has spent more time seeking funding than doing creative art, and it is sad that he has to sell his ideas in order to bring his creations to the public eye.

He has published over a dozen volumes of travelogues and paintings in cooperation with publishers and they have sold well. He has many more publishing plans, but he cannot find a sponsor. Nowadays, all publishing houses are market-oriented, and cultural works accentuating art without the guarantee of large sales have to be shelved.

Shui often hosts his personal photo exhibitions. A couple of years ago, he worked with the subway company and successfully held a photo show of the tropical region Xishuangbanna, in Yunnan Province, southwest China. He also held photo exhibitions featuring the Silk Road and the Yellow River in the United States, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

It's Sink or Swim for HK Artists

He likes to paint and teach children how to draw. "I sponsored kids from poor families with earnings from my Silk Road photo shows, and I have taken them on sketching tours to mainland areas, including Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, as well as Taiwan and Macao. Later I had their work compiled into a book called 'China under the Colors Rendered by Kids from Hong Kong'. I also worked with tourism authorities in the United Kingdom and have taken kids there on sketching expeditions." Shui had to raise funds for all this, all because of his love for kids. His work often features children, even if he has to subsidize the work himself.



Shui has shot feature films too. He once went to work on a small Philippine island where he made the movie "An Accidental Encounter", starring the late actress Pauline Chen. That was his last feature

movie. He believes the film industry in Hong Kong is too commercial and nobody wants to invest in artistic movies or documentaries. He has many scripts deep in his heart, but none of them can be turned into a real production because nobody wants to invest in them.

Shui is full of complaints concerning the arts in Hong Kong. "The government does not really support the art industry and leaves the artists to sink or swim. Hong Kong has only one college for training people in show business, but ignores

all other forms of art. I have never seen places that teach photography, painting and singing. So it is very hard to engage in real art in Hong Kong. You have to rely on yourself and cannot expect training or help from the government."

Art Education Last

All distribution and promotion activities Shui undertakes are non-profitable. What motivates him then? "I find it interesting and rewarding to bring people something to see and feel through the camera and I have felt this way for many years. Therefore, I tour the world to host exhibitions and end up spending a lot in travelling. To compensate, I would find way to travel more economically, like setting out from Shenzhen whenever I travel to Mainland China. However, the cost for an exhibition is still too much, especially when it comes to developing films and enlarging pictures. Sometimes an exhibition consists of 30 to 40 pictures, all 40" by 60" in size, which really costs me a fortune. To engage in artistic creation in Hong Kong, you have to live frugally.

1. Enjoying himself in the restaurant
2. Sound-recording for a radio show
3. Sharing his experience in photography
4. Sifting the pictures he took at Jiuzhaigou Scenic Area

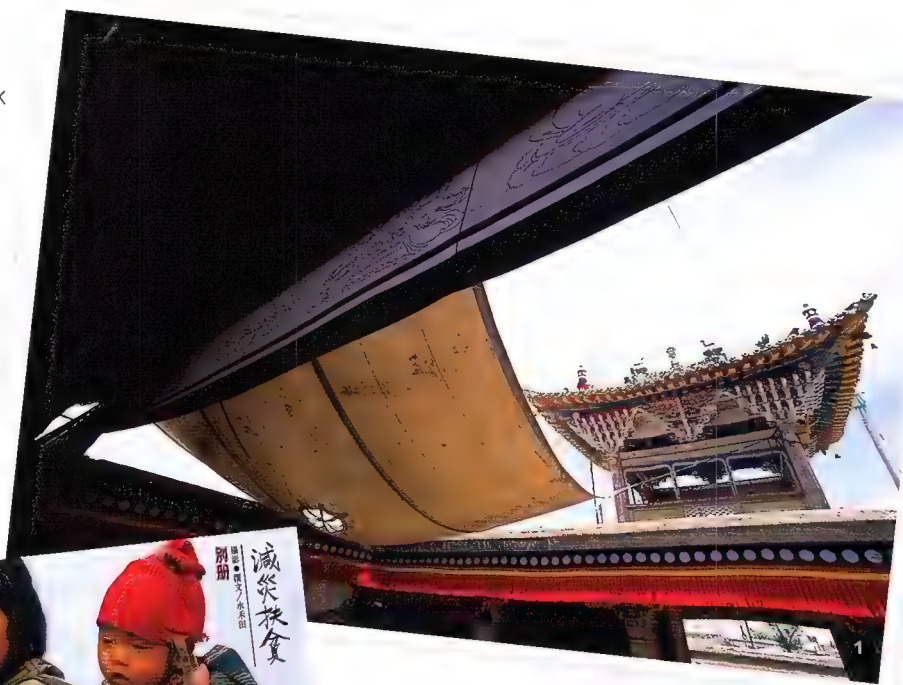
Without sponsorship, you have to work according to your means of paying the bills."

He was in Taipei recently to attend a local exhibition to mark the 30th anniversary of the "V-10 Visual-Art Group". The show was very successful, and it gained much publicity on major public media.

"It is impossible for this to happen in Hong Kong," he remarks. "Hong Kong media are staying further and further away from local arts. Their culture sections have shrunk in size, leaving ever diminishing opportunities for us to develop our talents. They prefer sensational news, stuff like anecdotes about pop stars. Young people today have no examples to follow, no spiritual goals to attain. Artistic room in Hong Kong is getting smaller and smaller. We have no chance to help the young to grow. Only us, the oldsters, are holding on quietly."

Reality vs Ideal

The future seems bleak, but Shui has a new plan. Next year, he plans to hold a life-size replica exhibition of the 25th cave of the Yulin Grottoes (Dunhuang) in Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Memorial Hall in Taipei. "Even if you have the budget, you can't get a space that big in Hong



Kong." Shui sighed.

His schedule is full. He is about to leave for Shanghai for an exhibition in November, entitled "Water and Rice Fields (which is the straight translation of his name) — A Dream in South China". Then he will return to Vancouver for an ink-and-wash painting exhibition. "I can't afford to spend all of my time on photography," he smiles. "I have to make a living partially by selling paintings." He has to make a basic living before he can talk about the pursuit of ideals, truth, benevolence and beauty. However, in a fast-moving society driven by competition, money and profit, people often have no time to catch their breath. They often lose sight of the more important things in life.

He has travelled extensively, and thus has made many friends in different fields. To an artist, these contacts are very helpful in getting financial support.

He shows me the way back to the underground train station. "I chose the minibus to get here (which is a more expensive fare) only because I was pressed for time," he explains. "Actually, taking the underground train is convenient. I did it every day when I worked there." He is still counting the pennies for his next big project.

Translated by F. Huang & Li Guoqing



1. The temple in Tibet (by Shui Hetian)
2. Shui's albums (by Shui Hetian)
3. Feel relaxed after recording
4. Shui's creative visiting card

Postscript

Although he is short of money, he has another ambitious plan. "I want to make a documentary," he tells me. "I have the script in my mind. I only need to find a sponsor. It is about several impoverished households in Qingyuan, Guangdong..." At this, his face lights up with excitement. May he find a sponsor soon!



2004 Calendar Symphony in Red



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Winter Shooting at the Imperial Hunting Ground

Photos & Article by Li Ping

Jiangjunao

Yudaozou Pasture

Weichang
(the hunting ground)

● Chengde

The hunting ground and summer resort of China's emperors — Bashang — in the grip of winter is a place of extreme beauty. However, the severity of the weather and the dangerous icy roads could deter many photographers going there.

Last January at the invitation of friends, I plucked up the courage to brave the cold and join them on a journey to Bashang, northern Hebei Province.

We left Beijing in a cross-country vehicle and reached Chengde in the evening. The next morning we drove to Weichang

(hunting ground) then Bashang at a cautious 50 to 60 km per hour on ice and snow covered roads. It was 2 pm when we arrived at the Hongshan Horse Ranch where we spent the night.

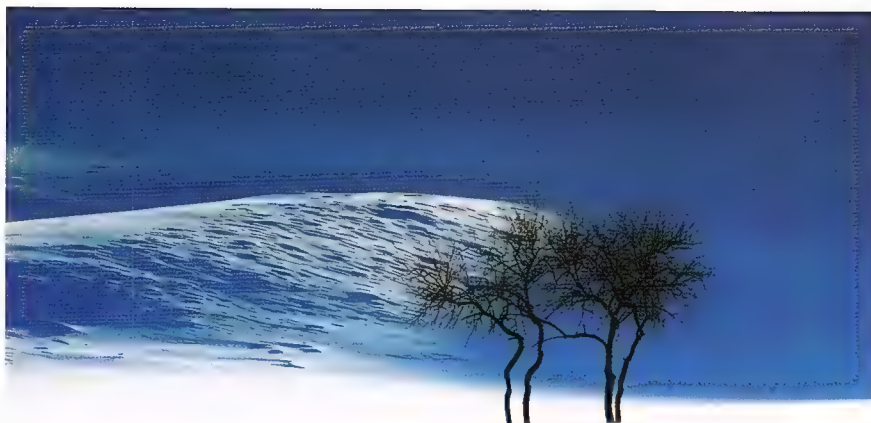
We started off towards north the next day. We found the grasslands outside the

horse-ranch lying beneath a blanket of snow. In the distance the hills were cloaked in white. It was difficult to keep to the track and worse yet, our vehicle got stuck in a ditch. So it was on with the overcoats and we set off to our destination with tripods and cameras on our backs.



Snow-covered Bashang at sunset

Nikon F5 AF80-200mm f11 (plus 1.3-grade aperture) 1/125 (all photos are shot with Kodak 100 film)



Snow fields at Bashang

Nikon F5 Angenieux (lens) AF28-70mm f11 (plus 2-grade aperture) 1/250



Frost laden trees

Nikon F5 Angenieux (lens) AF28-70mm f11 (plus 1-grade aperture) 1/250

It was necessary to take account of the light reflected from the snow, which misled the light sensor, and 1/2 EV stops were needed to compensate exposure.

Falling under the spell of so many artistic opportunities, we were soon fully absorbed in our work, our fingers unaware of the icy cold. As it became even colder at sunset, we had to hurry back.

On the third day we went to shoot an icy wonderland on a hill in the Yudaokou pastureland. Thanks to a freezing mist that

had descended during the night and early that morning, the branches of the trees were hung heavy with sparkling icicles. The sunshine playing on the white vastness was dazzling.

In the afternoon we went to Jiangjunpao to shoot more photographs. We lost our way and left the vehicle to go on foot to a vantage point on a nearby hillside. Here we were able to capture more scenic beauty on film. We were presented with a pure and unspoilt panorama of dark trees set against a white landscape under the blue sky.


It gave us opportunities for clean, but outstanding, compositions. Later the scene was transformed as a weak yellowish light from the setting sun worked its magic on the landscape and the horizon.

On the fourth day the outdoor temperature dropped to -35°C and we went to Hamuba, in Huamugou. Every day at 9:00 am the herdsmen of the village take their sheep out to pasture, providing excellent subjects for the camera.

On the fifth day we were hit by icy winds that pierced us to the marrow.

We were confined to areas relatively close to the village because of the length of time it took to warm up the vehicle. Consequently we got to know the routine of the cattle, sheep and horses at the Hongshan Horse Ranch. In the morning and evening we would find a high point from which to capture them on film as they made their way back and forth between their pens and the grazing.

The thermometer kept dropping. It became so cold that it was not possible for us to visit the many scenic spots in Hebei Province.

It was only reluctantly that we eventually set off on the journey home. 

Translated by Chen Qiping

Tips:

Getting there : Trains and flights to Beijing are available in most big cities. There are many trains from Beijing to Chengde, from where you can take a bus to Weichang (the hunting ground). Or you can take an eight-hour bus ride direct from the Xizhimen Bus Station in Beijing to Weichang. A minibus service is available from Weichang to Hongshan Horse Ranch for about 17 yuan (~US \$2). A car rental service is also available at about 250 yuan (~US \$30) per day.

Accommodation : Hotels are available at all locations; expect to pay upwards of 100 yuan (~US \$10) a day. However in the depths of a severe winter, only the Dahuzi Hotel stays open for business at Hongshan Horse Ranch, 40 yuan (~US \$5) per bed. At the hotel you can get a jeep and a guide for 240 yuan (~US \$30) per day.

Homes of Deities

Photos & Article by Hu Yinggang



Guan Zhong people are comforted by the thought of having one or more deities watching over them, hence they prefer to place graven images of their gods in small niches at their homes. As one enters a village of Guan Zhong, niches of deity can be seen ensconced in recesses in courtyard houses, and on doorways and walls. Villagers like to place the deities clearly visible at the entrance of the houses, for they believe that only this way can the inhabitants be protected all year around.

There are several kinds of niches, ranging from the luxurious permanent home to the temporary dwelling place. Permanent niches are designed before the houses are built. About 20 years ago, village houses were made of mud. Niches were for the most part built from adobe or sun-dried mud bricks. Today the villagers have demolished the old homes and use concrete for their new homes.

Guan Zhong, or Central Shaanxi Plains, is the birthplace of Chinese agricultural civilization. In remote antiquity of 1100 B.C., one great man taught people how to plough and sow in the bend of a river, and he was honored by later generations as the Divine Farmer. It was perhaps from that time onward that the God of Earth (Divine Farmer), who looks after the practical needs of farmers, became one of the most important deities of the Guan Zhong people. Nowadays, however, it seems that more people are worshipping the God of Wealth though.





Niches are now made of black bricks and smoothed by cement. Times have change, but the idols remain petite, for they are seldom taller than 10 cm.

Ironically, Guan Zhong people do not regard religion as a serious matter. When people are busy with farm work, they would have no time to worship. The niches are even less important and often ignored by people in ordinary times. A sorceress or wizard, who practices magic healing and fortune-telling, can easily replace the need for such deities. Religious belief and worship, therefore, have never integrated into the life of Guan Zhong people. The temples and idols being built in the rural places are usually very simple and crude, and they all share similar features.

In the wake of economic development in the 21st century, the meaning of niches is almost lost to the people of Guan Zhong, and they are reduced to interior decorations. Only at the Chinese New Year do the villagers remember decorating their niches, doorways and windows anew. Niches-worship in the Chinese New Year is an annual event in life, a necessary event in the journey of life and a wish for a better life ahead for the Guan Zhong people.





The Tibetan Artist who Brought out divines

AMDO QAMBA

Photos & Article by Wen Pulin

One of the greatest Tibetan painters of all time, Amdo Qamba, passed away in March, 2002. I still vividly remember our first encounter about three years ago. Amdo Qamba was 85 when he went to Beijing for treatment in the summer of 2000 for the cataract that was eroding his eyesight. The operation that he had wanted to pay for was completed smoothly, and he walked independently at last. The guards removed from his eyes. The vision brought new vision, and went by to the old ones.



Witnessed many historic moments, Amdo Qamba devoted his life to painting that resulted in a body of work that vividly portrays the mysteries of Tibet. His album covers the entire period of Buddhism since the birth of Sakyamuni, up to the ancient Tubo Dynasty of about 1000 years ago.

Resume to Secular Life

Amdo Qamba was born in Jianzha County, Qinghai province in 1914. He became a monk in his hometown at the age of seven. He learnt to paint by self-study, and from the age of 23 to 28 he studied painting in the temple.

During the 1940's when he was still a lama priest, he enjoyed great fame as a painter. One day, a wealthy merchant in Lhasa asked him to paint the pictures in the temple. As Qamba painted, he met

the servant woman, and they fell in love. Since monks are forbidden to marry, Qamba had to first leave the temple. Yet, when Qamba found himself free from the religious restrictions all of a sudden, he immediately indulged in the worldly life. Soon enough, he lost interest in marrying his lover, and in the course of time there was no more place for her in his heart.

He was a vagrant in the street from 1944 to 1954 (the age of 30 to 40), and he spent the happiest time of his life freely. He

associated with Gedun Choephel, who became his good friend and mentor.

Gedun Choephel (1903—1951) is an unusual priest in modern Tibetan history. He wrote many books, on topics ranging from history, Buddhism, art, logic, and language to geography. His "White Annals" is the first book without mythological taint among Tibetan history books. In accordance with scientific principles, events are listed in order of occurrence or in accordance with chronology. He wrote "Arts of Love" (Vdod-pavi-bstan-bcos), which greatly shocked the society. On top of that,



1. Famous figures in Tibetan Buddhism painted by Amdo Qamba (from left to right): Living Buddha Langren; Living Buddha Daza, Regent of the 13th Dalai Lama; Living Buddha Kanbo; and the 13th Dalai Lama.
2. Gedun Choephel (middle) and an Indian Lama, both were Amdo Qamba's teachers and friends.



Gedun Choephel was also a highly talented painter. As a man of wisdom he cared little for fame and wealth. He achieved the highest scholastic standing of Geshe lharampa, and accompanied the monk Dharmacarya on a tour of investigation abroad to India.

Amdo Qamba had maintained a close relationship with Gedun Choephel, whom clearly had a strong influence on Qamba, including artistic concept, style, colour and characterization.

Qamba's early work, portrait of "Bai Du Mu" (White Tara), showed his old style. It

was a bold piece that revolutionized the art circle. He portrayed the White Tara as a half naked goddess who was decorated with golden jewelry and pearls. The lower part of her body was covered with a thin skirt, as light as the wing of a cicada. Her right arm hung downward, pointing to the poisonous snake, which was bent on harm. The painting depicted how the White Tara conquered the snake and demon.

This painting of a religious subject showed White Tara with the flavor of pre-Raphael can rival Sandro Botticelli's "Spring" (Italian early Renaissance painter,

1445—1510). It is to be doubted, however, that British culture, which was popular in Tibet in those days, actually influenced Amdo Qamba.

Measuring History

Qamba became even more well known in Lhasa in the early 1950s, because he painted the picture of Mao Zedong presented by the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama when they participated in the First National People's Congress in Beijing in 1954. It was for this reason Qamba was invited to the palace of Panchen Lama to paint. Qamba even came to



Beijing together with the Dalai Lama as one of the entourage in 1954.

During his stay in Beijing he visited the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He was deeply touched by the realistic depictions of female nudity when he saw that the school had fine art nude models. As a result, Amdo Qamba asked to stay and studied in the Academy for two months.

Though he marveled at the superb sketch and oil painting techniques at the Academy, he felt from the bottom of his heart that he learned nothing more than what he had from his own experience in the past 20 years.

He was a gifted painter who solved the problem of sketching and three-dimensional effect through an understanding of the relations between black and white. Owing to his novel way of comprehension he created a brand-new style in color expression based on traditional Tibetan painting hues. Once he said, "I use neither Western nor oriental methods in my paintings. I paint and mix colours with my own way gained from practice. I'm my own teacher."

Amdo Qamba always shows great respect to the extensive and rich traditional Tibetan art. The 1000-year-old murals and sculptures in the temples and halls greatly influenced him from childhood. At the same time, his skill was stimulated by the superb landscape, combined with beautiful nature and rich art, history and religion.

Many other Tibetan painters always followed the rules and accepted practice of the tradition art, but Amdo Qamba regarded outmoded conventions and practices with indifference. He was the first artist with his own initiative and modern significance in Tibetan history.

Tibetan painters formed their own trade union "Lariba Zhizhu" (meaning painters of Bodhisattva of the Potala Palace) during the Fifth Dalai Lama period. The trade union also acted as an organization for local governments of Tibet to manage the artists and assign tasks for the painters. The painters were graded in line with their skills and the outstanding painters were ranked senior painters.

During the past 300 years, professional painters in Lhasa were more than honoured to be a member of the trade union. Artists from the trade union painted all the murals of Potala Palace, Norbulingka Temple, and other big temples at different periods. Yet, Amdo Qamba refused to join the trade union,

1. **Three Heroic Kings of Tubo Regime (Songtsan Gambo, Chisong Detsan and Rebajin) painted by Amdo Qamba.**
2. **A Tangka painted in typical traditional style.**



Tangka

Tangka is a form of painting featuring Buddhist images drawn on cloth with special paints made of minerals. When completed, the picture has silk patched on the four sides and rolls fixed at its top and bottom. It can easily be packed in one's luggage or hung on the wall. As a sacred religious article, a Tangka needs to be presented in a special ceremony to obtain the power and wisdom from Buddha. For thousands of years, Tangka has been of great importance to Tibetan Buddhism. Wherever the worshippers are, as long as they have a Tangka with the Buddhist image painted on it, Buddha is with them. In the lamaseries in Tibet, besides murals and sculptures, people also worship the images painted in Tangka pictures. Every year, all the major temples hold magnificent ceremonies to display their precious collection of huge Tangka paintings. When followers see a sacred Tangka, they become as excited as if they had seen Buddha himself.



because he thought it was pointless.

Since returning to Tibet in 1955 Amdo Qamba has become a painter of the imperial court. He created two enduring work in Norbulingka Temple, the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace, in 1956, "The Sakyamuni Preaching a Sermon", and "Weighing the Triloka" (or "Kansong Saineng", meaning power dominating the three realms of heaven, the land, and people. It includes several dozen characters, such as Kalong of Kasha Tibet government, Lamas, representatives of the Republic of China, and deities).

The painting of "Sakyamuni Preaching a Sermon" has the beautiful tropical scenery of the Henghe River as the background, while Sakyamuni, sitting in the middle, is preaching to his first group of followers. Amdo Qamba adopted the Western perspective in this

painting resulting in an open space and an accurate light and shade perspective relation. The colour of the mural is graceful and smooth, demonstrating a great classical style that harks back to the classical murals of the Renaissance in western Europe. Naturally this mural has become the major representative work of the great painter.

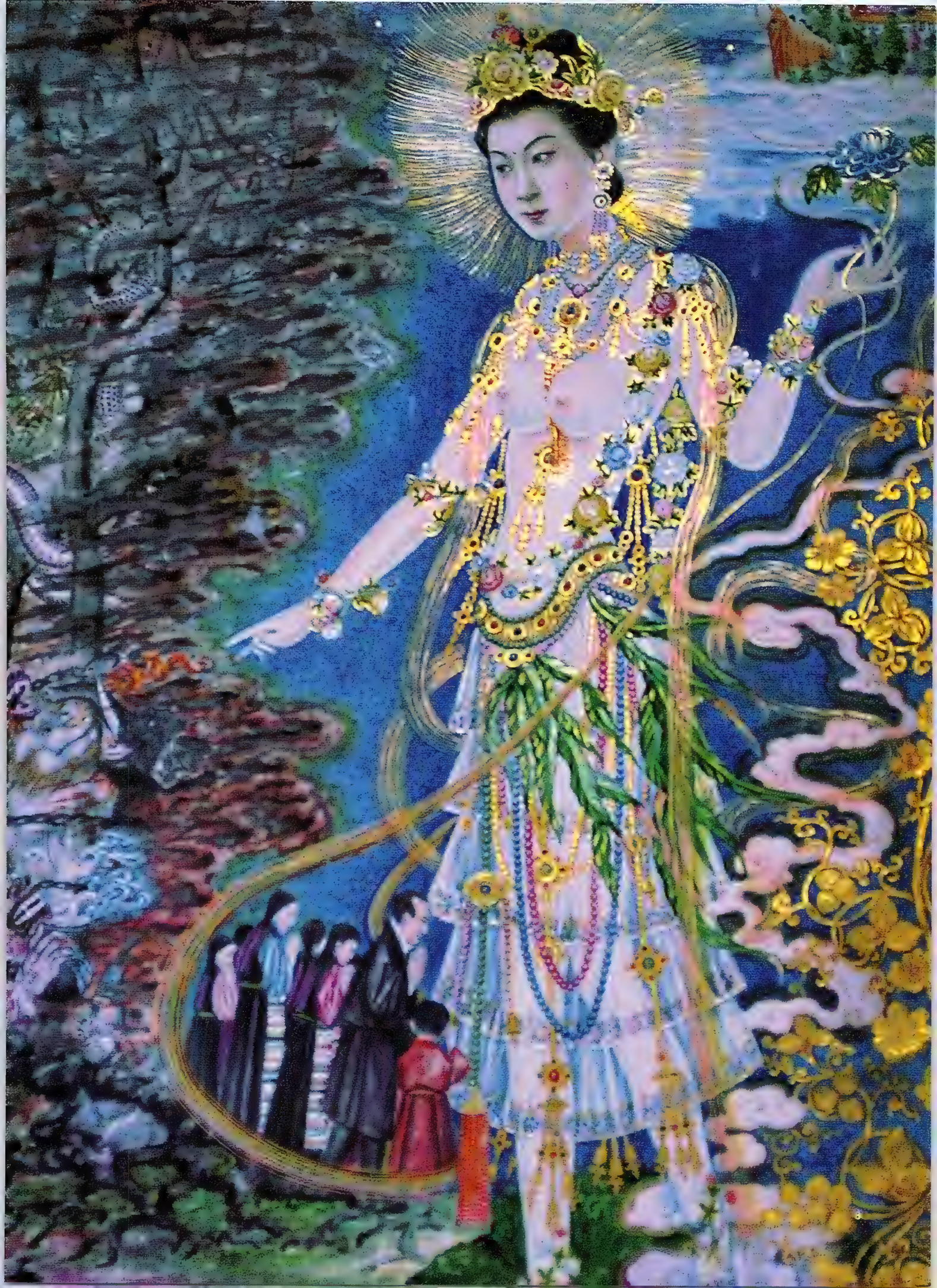
Amdo Qamba was greatly renowned for the two murals. Then false information was spread in Tibet that Amdo Qamba had been awarded the "Lejunba", first grade imperial painter, by the Tibetan government. It was this false information that caused him a bit of suffering in the political movements happened afterwards.

The unique painting method combining traditional Tibetan ways with western realistic methods came into existence from then on. It seems that Amdo Qamba was in

the same situation as Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo who painted for the Medici family during the Renaissance. Though the subjects of the paintings were defined and there were rules to follow, the artist, with a spirit of humanism, could still express his own new ideas, overstepping simple religious painting and adding his own comprehension of history and religion. His paintings revolutionized Tibet.

During the Cultural Revolution, Qamba did not suffer too much because of his talent which was admired by the local people. He

1. A portrait of Bodhisattva White Tara painted in the 1970s.
2. A Tangka painted with Qamba's youngest son as the model.
3. Portrait of Bodhisattva Bai Du Mu (White Tara) painted by Amdo Qamba.





was asked to paint pictures of Mao Zedong and the officials. He was the Lariba — maker of paintings of leaders, of the new age.

An Old Man's Unrealized Dreams

Amdo Qamba had three marriages. His

first wife gave birth to his first child; with the second wife, he had seven children; and with his third wife, he had two more, including one who was born when he was 80 years old. The man had an enviable vitality. It is said that he was an amorous young man, and even in his 80s, his medium-sized build remained straight and strong. Wearing walking shoes, a Tibetan hat and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, he looked scholarly and energetic. He was an active talker and once he started a conversation, he talked continuously in his low voice.

With support from the government, he finally set up the Amdo Qamba Fine Arts Private School. He had more than 30 students, most of whom were Lhasa natives.



There were exceptions, though, including one student from northeastern China, who was a graduate of the Shenyang Luxun Academy of Fine Arts, and a young woman from Germany. There were also women among the students from Lhasa. This was a new group of learners of Tangka painting.

However, Amdo Qamba had several other dreams that have not yet been realized. The first was to visit his hometown, Anduo,




3

so that he could have a look at his early works that remain there. The second wish was to publish an album of his paintings and biography to display his life and the history of Tibet in the past century. The last was to build a school of fine arts on a site of beautiful landscapes, with a mountain standing in the background and a river running in front. He hoped that together with his students, he could paint pictures all

over it, making it a colourful monument of Tibetan culture and arts.

In his career for almost 60 years, Amdo Qamba had created many excellent art works. His pictures, depicting the glorious tradition of Tibet as well as the vicissitudes he had witnessed, were invaluable treasures of the nation and the era, and have inspired many devoted Buddhists. In the eyes of the Tibetans, the Buddha,

Bodhisattvas and guardians painted by him are nothing short of real gods. Who has given Amdo Qamba such magical power? Both the man and his fellow-Tibetans agree that he owed it to the highest gods. 

1. Amdo Qamba depicted the female body.
2. The painting that the Dalai Lama sent to Mao Zedong as a gift in Beijing, by Amdo Qamba.
3. "Sakyamuni Preaching Buddhism" painted in the summer of 1956 in Norbu Linka.

BITS AND PIECES OF XISHUANGBANNA



The name Xishuangbanna comes from the Dai language. "Xishuang" means twelve, "Ban" one thousand, and "Na" paddy fields. Xishuangbanna therefore means "Twelve districts of one thousand mu (~67 ha) of paddy fields each". It is the general name given to twelve administrative bodies under twelve chieftains in the old days.

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture located on the banks of the Lancang River in the Southernmost part of Yunnan Province. The Lancang River links it to the countries in Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Xishuangbanna covers a total area of close to 20,000 km² with a boundary line of about 1000 km, and the prefecture seat is in Jinghong City. It is home to 13 ethnic national minorities groups, such as the Han,

Dai, Hani, Blang, Lahu, Jino, Yao and Yi. They live harmoniously together, and are on very friendly terms.

Climate:

Xishuangbanna has a tropical rain forest climate, with abundant sunshine, plentiful rain and frequent dense fog. It has an annual average temperature of 18 to 22°C. Since it has more rain from May to October, the best travelling time is around November to April.

Not only Xishuangbanna has a reputation for beautiful subtropical scenery and unique folk-culture attractions, it is also known as "the kingdom of plants and animals," because of its rich resources of flora and fauna. Visitors are welcome to view natural scenery of the tropical rain forest and chat with the local people in their bamboo houses.



GETTING THERE

By air: Xishuangbanna airport, five kilometers from Jinghong City, serves flights from Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Kunming, Bangkok, and some other big cities. It has six to ten scheduled flights to Kunming every day, taking only 50 minutes. The one-way fare is about 520 yuan (~US \$60) and you can pay 14 yuan (~US \$2) for a taxi from the airport to the city. Air ticket office: 8 Jingde Road, Jinghong City Tel: (691) 212 4774, 212 7040

Land: There are six highways connecting it with the other cities and neighboring countries. It is about 700 km from Kunming to Jinghong and the regular bus service takes about 13 to 14 hours. The price is 152 yuan (~US \$20).

Bus station in Xishuangbanna: Jinghong Beilu Tel: (691) 212 4427

The price of the ticket from Jinghong to Menglilun is 13 yuan (~US \$2); Jinghong to Daluo, Menglihai County, 22.5 yuan (~US \$3); Jinghong to Octagonal Pavillion, Menglihai County, 13 yuan (~US \$2); Jinghong to Menglihan, 6.5 yuan (~US \$1); and Jinghong to Mengliyang, 6 yuan (~US \$1).

ACCOMMODATION

Dai bamboo houses and star-level hotels are built for tourists. The following are the main hotels of Jinghong City:

(*Bicycles can be rented with a deposit of 200 yuan (~US \$20) and 8 yuan (~US \$1) for one hour)

Name	Star rating	Address	Telephone
Dai Garden Hotel	★★★★★	8 Nonglin Nanlu	212 3888
Huangguan (Crown) Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	212 8888
Caixin Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	213 9888
Xinmin Hotel	★★★★	2 Jingde Donglu	212 6888
Jinfeng Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	212 9888
Jinbanna Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	212 4901
Dalian Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	213 0999
Jindu Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	214 0888
Yintong Hotel	★★★★	Tourist holiday area	214 9888
Banna Hotel	★★★	11 Galan Zhonglu	212 2974
Jinghong Hotel	★★	16 Galan Zhonglu	212 3166
Banna Mansion	★★	1 Jinghong Xilu	212 5100
Luqiao Hotel	★★	35 Jinghong Xilu	214 1888
Jing'e Hotel	★★	27 Jinghong Beilu	212 4093
Jiaotong Hotel	★★	23 Jinghong Beilu	212 8390

MAIN ATTRACTIONS

1. Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

The botanical garden, located at the gourd-shaped peninsula surrounded by the Luosuo River in Menglilun Town, Mengli County, covers 900 ha. The botanical garden is home to more than 9,000 tropical plants from around the world. It mainly engages in research on tropical plants and preservation of plant resources, scientific and technological development, popular science and ecological education. Now it has been designated an AAAA-level state scenic site.

Guide: It is about 70 km to Jinghong City and is open 24 hours with 35 yuan (~US \$4) admission. You can fly or take a bus from Kunming to Jinghong City and then take a direct bus to Menglilun. When you get to the bus station you can take a motor tricycle to the garden.

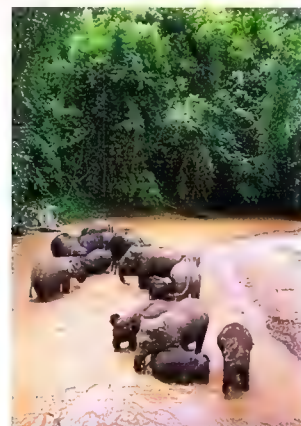
Internet: <http://www.xtbg.ac.cn>

2. Wild Elephant Valley

The most exciting scenic spot. You can take the cable tram to the top of the mountains and walk across the rainforest area. Along the way you can enjoy the landscapes of the rain forest. The treetop corridor hangs in the trees and on the both sides "tree hotels" have been built. When you stay in the "tree hotel" you can hear the wild elephants. If you are lucky, you can see herds of wild elephants in the evening or at dawn. Plants that the wild elephants like to eat have been planted to attract them to this area.

Guide: The valley, inside the Mengliyang State Natural Reserve, is 36 km from Jinghong and open 24 hours. There are regular buses from Jinghong. Telephone of the Jinghong bus station: (691) 213 3657, or 212 6310. You can also take the bus from Jinghong to Simao and get off in front of the park. Admission is 25 yuan (~US \$3) and the cable tram costs 40 yuan (~US \$5) one way and 60 yuan (~US \$7) return.

Internet: <http://www.yunnantourism.com/banna/elephant.html>



3. Virgin Forest Garden

The forest garden, eight kilometers from Jinghong City, is close to the Kunlun Highway. Tourists can enjoy the unique natural scenery of the virgin forest and the fascinating cultures and customs of the ethnic minorities. This garden has over 50 scenic attractions, such as the tropical rainforest valley, the peacock centre, the wild animal performance, the Dai village, the Hani village, Nine-Dragon Falls, the White Pagoda, the 100-m-long granite relief, the Golden Lake and the outdoor barbecue place in Alave style.

Guide: Regular buses go from Jinghong to the garden. It is open 24 hours and the admission is 35 yuan (~US \$4). Internet: <http://www.bn163.net/mblnx/travel/index.html>

4. Dai Ethnic Group Garden in Xishuangbanna

Ganlanba is the lowest flatland in Xishuangbanna, and Dai bamboo houses dot the green coconut and olive trees. The garden is composed of a customs appreciation area, holiday area, beach area and water area. On important occasions, grand activities are held here.

Guide: Regular buses run from Jinghong to Ganlanba, taking 45 minutes to an hour. The fare is 6.5 yuan (~US \$1) and admission to the garden 35 yuan (~US \$4). Dai style food and accommodation are provided.

Address: 94 Manchunman Village, Dai Ethnic Group Garden Tel: (691) 250 4315 Contact: Yu Jin

5. Damenglilong White Pagoda

Damenglilong White Pagoda is about 60 km from Jinghong, and is renowned in Southeast Asia. During the major Dai festivals, pious Hinayanists come to the pagoda to hold Buddhist ceremonies. This group of nine pagodas was built in 1204 and the main one is about 16 m high.

Guide: Regular buses run from Jinghong to Damenglilong and admission is 5 yuan (~US \$1).

6. The Octagonal Pavilion in Jingzhen Hill

The Octagonal Pavilion, a key cultural relic under the state protection, was built on Jingzhen Hill, Menglizhe Township, Menglihai County, in 1701. It is a Buddhist pavilion made of brick and wood with a height of 22 m. The top of the pavilion is a lotus-shaped baldachin and it has 31 sides. It is a fine Buddhist work, combining advanced building technologies of Dai architecture.

Guide: Regular buses run from Jinghong to Menglihai County. The fare is 13 yuan (~US \$2).

JAN / FEB



Jan 22
Nationwide

The **Chinese New Year** (Spring Festival) is the most important festival in China. Beginning the first day of the lunar year, the celebration usually lasts for weeks. Chinese New Year is celebrated by Chinese throughout the world. Wherever one finds large Chinese communities, one finds large celebrations. There are numerous celebrations of Chinese folklore such as fireworks, family reunion feast, Yangge dancing, lion and dragon dancing, temple fairs, and many other.

Feb 5
Nationwide

During the **Lantern Festival**, red lanterns can be seen everywhere. Many types of delicate and splendidly ornamented lanterns are exhibited. Every family eats yuanxiao (a kind of rice ball stuffed with beans, sugar, and other sweets), which is a symbol of family reunion, unity, affection, and happiness. There will be many lantern fairs, garden parties, fireworks and folk dances.



Feb 27
Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province

Knife-Pole Festival is a traditional festival of the Lisu ethnic group in remembrance of a Han hero who taught them the proper technique of knife making. On the eve before the festival, brave warriors will dance and jump in the fire shoeless and unprotected. The most fascinating activity during the festival is to climb up 20-m-high poles inserted with 36 or 72 sharp knives. Performers will have to climb barefooted in this thrilling act.



Jan 23
Xinghai Square, Dalian

The **Spring Fireworks Festival** in Dalian features grand fireworks, trade fairs, and tour on the nationally famous Snacks Street and Crafts Street.

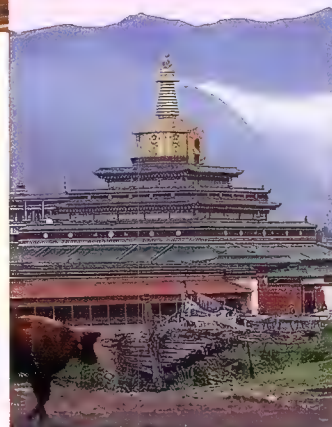
Feb 4, 5
Huangzhong County, Qinghai Province

The two days event of **Major Religious Assemblies in the Ta'er Lamasery** will exhibit Tibetan, Tu and Mongolian butter figures. In addition, many Buddhist activities, such as displaying large Buddhist images under the sun are also held.



Jan 25 — Feb 7
Labrang Lamasery, Xiahe, Gansu Province

The **Labrang Lamasery** in Xiahe is one of the six major lamaseries of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism and is the site of the largest college of Lamaism in the world. Every year seven large Buddhist assemblies are held here. During this time, images of the Buddha are displayed, religious dances are performed, scriptures are chanted, and scriptures are debated.



Feb 21
Tibet Autonomous Region

On the eve of the **Tibet New Year**, every household will paint lucky signs with wheat flour on kitchen walls and gates. Resin is burned on the roof, while painted seedlings of cereal crops and ears of wheat are displayed in the house. The festival is also observed with wrestling, horse racing, archery and other sports competitions. Grand groups dancing and Tibetan operas are performed.

Feature Story:**Time Travel to the Three Kingdoms Period**

Dicken's classic opening line "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" describes the Three Kingdoms Period (220 — 280 B.C.) perfectly. While there was a great deal of political activity occurring during this period, most of it, consisting as it was of various wars between the three different kingdoms. Countless legacies and heroic stories left behind after this turbulent time, and they continue to arouse people's fascination till today.

Would you like to re-live history? Follow along the route of Shudao (Sichuan Province), where it is filled with historic sites of this extraordinary time.

**Landscape: Yellow River – The Cradle of Chinese Civilization**

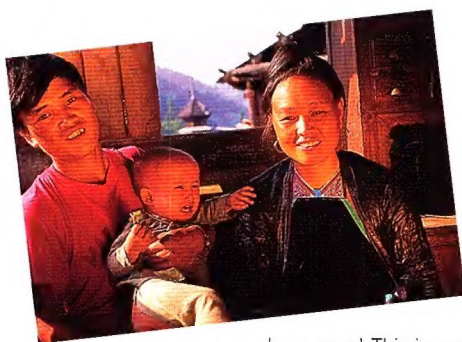
The water gurgles endlessly, as if singing a song to the mountains and forest. For several thousand years, the billowing Yellow River flows eastward day and night ceaselessly.

This amazing river can roar like an unbridled horse, but as the water reaches a comfortable and unhurried place, it flows silently. Yellow River becomes the cradle of Chinese civilization, a hallmark of pride that will be with all Chinese people until the end of time.

**Discoveries: The Secret of Ancient Family Panning**

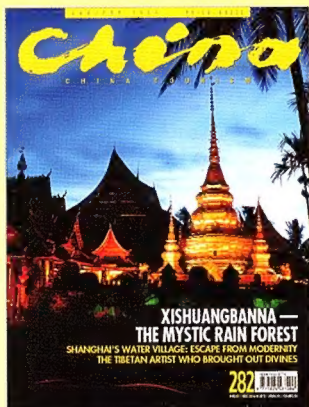
From time immemorial, the people of a seldom known village in Guizhou Province have adapted homemade medicinal herbs for birth control. These people have never access to modern medicine, but they have invented their own contraceptives, herbs for sterilisation, even a kind of "celestial herb" that can alter the sex of baby. All these methods are kept in strict confidential.

The most fascinating thing about these people is their tremendous success in population control using traditional means. Since 1949, the rate of natural population growth in Zhanli has been zero! This is wonderful news for the many over-populated cities of China.

**On the Way: Rendezvous with the Four Beauties**

Although there are countless numbers of peaks and summits in Sichuan Province, Mt. Siguniang (Four Beauties) is among the most captivating mountains indeed. When autumnal hues paint the entire plateau into a stunning landscape, this intoxicating beauty is enough to stun anyone speechless. In the vast horizon, as far as the eye could see, there are sun-drenched valleys and never-ending hills...





Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Xishuangbanna – The Mystic Rain Forest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shanghai's Water Village: Escape from Modernity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Tibetan Artist Who Brought out Divines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mysteries of the Grassland Buddha	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counting the Cost of a Big Heart	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
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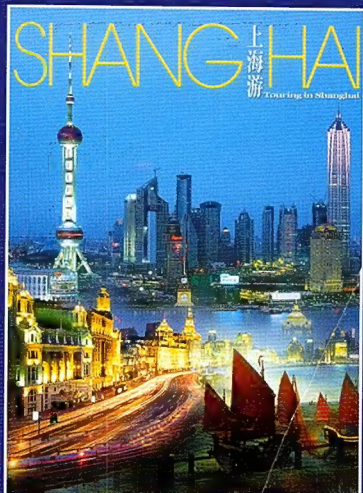
Are you happy with the factual content of *China Tourism*? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What are your suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.

BEST SELLER



Shanghai

has evolved at an unprecedented speed for decades into the biggest commercial city in China and one of the great metropolises of the world. Favourably located at the mouth of the Yangtse River, Shanghai has a long history and a rich culture. Commercial tower blocks and traditional buildings exude their individual charms simultaneously in the Pudong District, where hundreds of buildings in different styles, old or new, are collectively known as the Exposition of World Architecture. A kaleidoscope of entertainments and festivals of Old Shanghai attracts scores of entrepreneurs and travellers alike. "Touring in Shanghai" takes you deeper into this vibrant city

through spectacular photography, along with outlines for more than 10 different kinds of tours including a shopping tour, popular tourist sights, cultural excursions, and more. Practical information summarises accommodations, transport and dining options, and tourist maps are also included. "Touring in Shanghai" is the latest, most comprehensive travel pictorial of Shanghai available in Hong Kong.



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